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Analysis of American Policy Concerning Conduct of the Vietnam War as Reflected in the Chicago Tribune, 1966 - 1969, Using a Theoretical Model Derived from Clausewitz.

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By William M. Darley

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
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William McBride Darley. Thesis Title: Analysis of American Policy Concerning Conduct of the Vietnam War as Reflected in the Chicago Tribune, 1966-1969, Using a Theoretical Model Derived from Clausewitz. (This paper was written under the direction of Donald L. Shaw.)

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This study was undertaken to explore and help explain the relationship among the press, the government and the people during periods of military conflict.

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To Johnny Snyder, Elgin Juri and
Tom Callaghan.

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Chapter 1 -- Media Effect on Official Policy

One of the most controversial aspects of America's involvement in the Vietnam war has been the part played by the press. Charges of distortion, bias and lack of credibility in the dealings between administration officials and members of the press during the war continue to this day in discussions assessing media influence.¹

As students of the war have considered explanations for the war's final outcome, the role of the press has often been cited as a major factor. Vietnam has been called the "best reported but least understood" war in our history.² Many have concluded that the press came to be the decisive factor in the war's outcome. As Clarence Wyatt has observed, two images of the press have dominated discussion. One of these images "portrays the press as having sapped, through its own distortions, misrepresentations and weaknesses, America's will to pursue a 'noble cause' to victory." The other of these images casts the press as "a challenger of the lies of government officials -- a hero that, at least in part, helped to bring the war to an end."³

These two images seem to be grounded in an assumption of great power associated with editorial influence, that is, the power to influence the opinion of readership through

conscious selection of news intended to "expose" on the one hand; or, selection of news intended to shape the appearance of events in a way intended to "undermine" on the other hand.

But, as Wyatt asks, "How valid are these two images? Can we even speak of a single 'role' for the press during Vietnam?"⁴

That a large part of the "prestige" media -- media generally thought of as having national and international influence such as The New York Times and The Washington Post -- became highly critical of the war and opposed it on a variety of grounds is a matter of record.⁵ But, in assigning blame for the outcome of the war effort, some critics of the media have contended that the press wrongfully moved beyond the pale of loyal opposition in its "watchdog" role and began to actually support the enemy cause. In this role, the press has been accused by some of having willfully undermined public confidence in the war by using its influence to artificially create a climate of seeming defeat.⁶

The image of a biased, or even disloyal press, working to undermine the war effort is supported by some members of the press itself. Former Newsweek Far East correspondent Robert Elegant wrote, "The South Vietnamese were, first and last, decisively defeated in Washington, New York, London, and Paris." He continued, "The pen and the camera proved decisively mightier than the bayonet and ultra-modern

weapons....media defeats made inevitable their (South Vietnamese) subsequent defeat on the battlefield."⁷

Peter Braestrup drew a similar conclusion after studying the response of the prestige media to the 1968 Tet Offensive. He asserted that the media sensationalized the communist offensive in such a way as to turn a communist tactical defeat into a major psychological victory. He linked this distortion of a significant military action to a permanent decline in public support against the war.⁸

Military figures, in particular, have expressed bitterness with press activities, asserting that they contributed decisively to an American defeat in Vietnam. Also commenting on press coverage following the Tet Offensive of 1968, General William Westmoreland, a former commander of the Armed Forces in Vietnam, wrote:

Press and television had created an aura not of victory but of defeat, which, coupled with the vocal anti-war elements, profoundly influenced timid officials in Washington. It was like two boxers in a ring, one having the other on the ropes, close to a knock-out, when the apparent winner's second inexplicably throws in the towel.⁹

For many other senior military officers, "the press lost the war." As Drew Middleton has observed, "The armed forces emerged from the Vietnam War psychologically scarred. They were embittered by their failure to defeat the Vietnamese because of what they considered political

manipulation in Washington and, above all, by the media's treatment."¹⁰

But some students of the press, including some media figures themselves, assert that the press was instrumental in bringing an unwise and immoral war to a conclusion.

Media critic Cleveland Amory has said that when Walter Cronkite used his newscasts to speak out against the "deception" behind U.S. involvement in Vietnam, "he not only brought down a presidency, but also, to all intents and purposes, ended a war."¹¹

In support of this assertion, Paul Kattenburg has observed that the involvement in the Vietnam war was "an exercise in illusion which resulted in a tremendous loss of touch with reality on the part of U.S. policy-makers."¹² He said that the press role in bringing the war to a conclusion was to continually challenge the public relations images produced by self-deception until the public "ceased altogether to believe in the pronouncements of their leaders about the Indochina war."¹³

However, the image of a powerful press swaying public opinion against the war effort in a successful effort to bring it to a close has been challenged recently by many students of the media and practicing journalists. Daniel Hallin's exhaustive study of media images portrayed in television coverage of the war contradicts many assertions about the influence of so-called bias in negative images

conveyed to the American people which critics claim led to public loss of confidence in the war.¹⁴

Peter Arnett, a prominent Associated Press correspondent who covered the Vietnam war extensively, has expressed skepticism regarding Braestrup's conclusions in Big Story.¹⁵ And John Mueller's study comparing public opinion during the Korean and Vietnam wars "found that support for the wars among the general public followed a pattern for decline that was remarkably similar" even though media were not nearly so pervasive in Korea as they were in Vietnam.¹⁶ Mueller pointed out that opinion regarding support for the Vietnam war was moving significantly against the war well before the sudden shift asserted by some to have been caused by coverage of the 1968 Tet Offensive.¹⁷

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to suggest that the major influence leading to public as well as press disillusionment with the war was political policy itself. The findings of this paper appear to support both Hallin's and Wyatt's assertions that the editorial stance of the media themselves may have had much less influence than is often supposed in causing the public to lose faith in the war. The media role in influencing public opinion -- as represented here by one sample paper, the Chicago Tribune -- appears to have been

accurate communication of this policy and the effects growing out of it.

The method of research used in preparing this paper was to catalog and compare images of national war policy as they appeared to readers of the Chicago Tribune from 1966 to 1969, and to analyze qualitatively war policy against a theoretical model of society at war as described by Karl Von Clausewitz, a 19th century soldier-philosopher, derived from his well-known book, On War. The book was first published in 1832.

The author read every issue of the Chicago Tribune for 1966 and 1969; for January through March and November through December, 1967; and for January through April, 1968, for coverage of the Vietnam war and for domestic effects possibly related to war policy. The intervening months in 1967 and 1968 were not reviewed because the news for those months was largely focused on domestic turmoil arising from racial strife.

It is possible that conclusions reached in this study would be somewhat altered by other findings during the months excluded.

Clausewitz was used because he is a highly respected military theorist whose writings have been extensively studied by military strategists throughout the world. Students of military affairs have placed particular value on Clausewitz's ideas concerning the relationship between the economic, social and political makeup of the state as

factors determining the nature of the state's military forces. Many of the precepts he described as tenets for the successful conduct of war have been incorporated into the military doctrines of both Western democracies as well as nations behind the Iron Curtain.

The model devised for this analysis was suggested in part by Harry Summers, author of the military textbook, On Strategy, who used the writings of Clausewitz to analyze overall American strategic failures during the Vietnam conflict.¹⁸ Summers gives some attention to the importance of public opinion and press relations in his study. But, apart from the broad study of strategy by Summers, the researcher is unaware of any other studies in the field of mass communication that have used Clausewitz to analyze treatment of war policy in a major newspaper. Clausewitz's theory of war, however, potentially gives the researcher a broad, somewhat unique, perspective for consideration of the relationship among the press, the government and the people during periods of military crisis.

An objective of this paper is indirectly to help focus on the question of media influence by setting aside whatever influence highly visible war critics in the media may have had, either in their editorial comment or in their presentation of the news, and directly to examine the nature of some of the information that was actually being passed to the public by the press using an in-depth approach to one newspaper, the Chicago Tribune.

Method

Studies of media effects on the war have often focused on comparing the accuracy, balance or fairness of news reports from the actual battlefields of Vietnam to more complete historical accounts available later. However, efforts to establish the truthfulness of content within given news reports in relation to a reporter's (or official source's) intent to misrepresent merely pits the word of the reporter against the word of the reported.

As a result, for the purposes of this paper, the researcher tried to select a medium where bias against the war was least likely to occur -- a "conservative" newspaper with an editorial position supportive of the war. The newspaper selected was the Chicago Tribune.

Of course, use of a presumed conservative news source creates the problem of possible bias slanted in the opposite direction, that is, bias supporting the war. But, since proving objectivity in any medium is difficult, the researcher reasoned that use of a highly respected, responsible newspaper that, despite its editorial position, likely valued objectivity in newsreporting, would at worst produce sanitized, uncritical versions of the reported facts of a war it basically supported. This study is not generalizable to the whole U.S. press.

A Model from Clausewitz

In order to analyze media influence on the Vietnam war, a starting point of analysis must necessarily begin with some theoretical frame of reference specifying, among other things, how public opinion influences war and what characteristics a policy of war should have in order for it to sustain public support.

Karl Von Clausewitz was an 19th century Prussian officer who, following the defeat of the Prussian state by Napoleon, became deeply involved in the philosophical study of the relationship between political, economic and social forces within the concept of a state as he served on a committee of reform-minded politicians and professional soldiers considering the problem of reviving Prussia. The work of this group was substantially validated when many of the political reforms put in place helped reconstitute the Prussian state.¹⁹

Following his association with this circle of thinkers he gained a great deal of practical experience at the policy level actually waging war against Napoleon, first as an officer in the Russian army and later as an officer in the reconstituted Prussian army. Following the Napoleonic wars, Clausewitz worked out his ideas concerning the relationship between the people, the military and the state in a theoretical treatise titled, On War.²⁰

His stated reason for formulating a "theory," like that of any other philosopher, was not to invent artificial tenets to direct human behavior, but to enlarge understanding of the principles governing human nature by organizing observations and explaining their relationship through the process of reason. His more practical motive was to organize his observations into a useful system of universal principles to be used as an instrument to distinguish proper conduct of war from improper: the workable from the unworkable. Explaining this purpose, he wrote:

There is, upon the whole, nothing more important in life than to find out the right point of view from which things should be looked at and judged of, and then to keep to that point; for we can only apprehend the mass of events in their unity from one standpoint; and it is only the keeping to one point of view that guards us from inconsistency.²¹

The Elements of War

The essential concept of Clausewitz' theory is that war is a political activity conducted by means of violence. "War," he wrote in a much quoted sentence, "is not merely a political act, but also a real political instrument, a continuation of political commerce, a carrying out of the same by other means."²²

In analyzing his theory of policy in regards to the conduct of war, Clausewitz contended that a civilized society had within it certain basic "elements" that became active during periods of war. He described these as a "trinity composed of the original violence of its elements, hatred and animosity, which may be looked upon as blind instinct; of the play of probabilities and chance, which make it a free activity of the soul; and of the subordinate nature of a political instrument, by which it belongs purely to the reason."²³

A more basic restatement is that the basic elements of war were the primeval animosity latent in the people that was directed at the enemy of the state; the play of probability and chance meant the degree of skill by the military in applying the principles of chance to achieve success on the battlefield in the same sense as a statistician uses probabilities to achieve some research objective; and the use of reason by the political heads of state in managing and directing the other two elements.

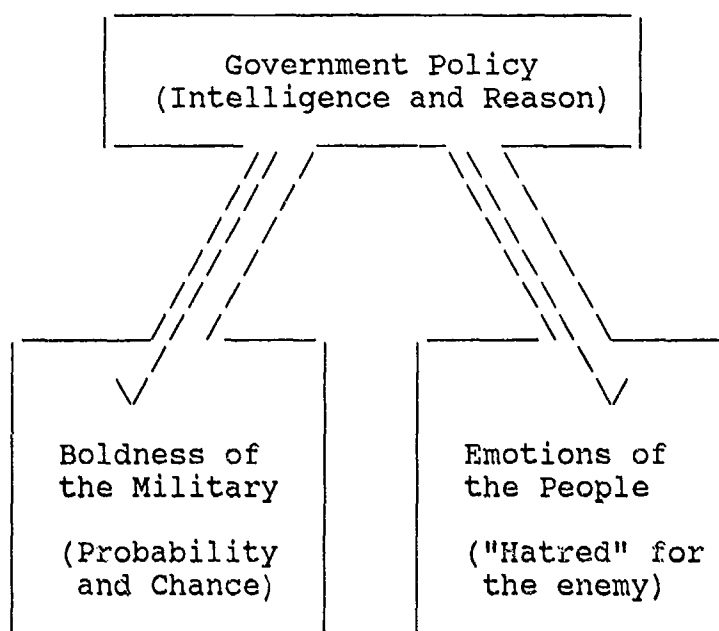
Policy in War

The reasoned process of applying animosity and chance to accomplish political objectives of the state Clausewitz called "policy." And, according to Clausewitz, policy was preeminent because it not only directed, but also shaped the nature of the other two elements (See Figure 1). "If policy

is grand and powerful," he wrote, "so also will be the War."²⁴ But, if policy is weak and vacillating, so then will be the instrument of war.²⁵ "In one word, the Art of War in its highest point of view is policy," Clausewitz wrote.²⁶

Figure 1

Clausewitz' Concept of the Relationship of
of Policy to the Essential Elements of War



Since policy makers had the responsibility of establishing policy for war, it was imperative that they have an understanding that what differentiated it from other political instruments was "violence."²⁷ This was the proper nature of war, he asserted, and could not be overlooked. War was properly understood only as "an act of violence pushed to its utmost bounds."²⁸ To understand it as

something else was "to introduce into the philosophy of War itself a principle of moderation (that) would be an absurdity," he said.²⁹

Clausewitz conceived of the policy of war as a ship of state which willfully introduced into the channel of normal activity the element of "violence" in order to achieve its specified political objective.³⁰ He warned:

This is the way in which the matter must be viewed, and it is to no purpose, it is even against one's own interest, to turn away from the consideration of the real nature of the affair because the horror of its elements excites repugnance.³¹

Policy Influenced by "Benevolence"

Continuing, he warned that the violent and cruel nature of war had to be clearly understood by makers of policy because those who did not understand the nature of the elements and tried to dilute its elements by mixing in what he called "benevolence" in an effort to change the nature of war were inviting catastrophe. "Benevolence" was a term he used to describe measures taken out of sense of kindness and "feelings of humanity" toward the enemy that were contradictory to the elements of war. He said:

Now, philanthropists may easily imagine there is a skillful method of disarming and overcoming an enemy without causing great bloodshed, and that this is the proper tendency of the Art of War. However plausible this may appear, still

it is an error which must be extirpated; for in such dangerous things as War, the errors which proceed from a spirit of benevolence are the worst.³²

Policy and "Friction"

As a result of the introduction of violence into the channel of political activity, it became saturated with an element that impeded progress towards the political objective. He called this element "friction."³³

"Friction" he largely defined as intensified emotional tension, particularly in human relations, within the people and the military due to the uncertainty and unreliability of unfolding circumstances brought on by the effects and material consumption of war's violence. Describing these effects, he wrote:

Activity in War is movement in a resistant medium. Just as a man immersed in water is unable to perform with ease and regularity the most natural and simplest movement, that of walking, so in War, with ordinary powers, one cannot keep even the line of mediocrity.³⁴

Moreover, the effects of friction were cumulative, building up within the channels of political activity as the war continued. "These difficulties accumulate and produce a friction which no man can imagine exactly who has not seen War," he wrote.³⁵

"Friction" threatened a state engaged in war because it was a corrosive agent that steadily accumulated as a war progressed while constantly eating away at the "equilibrium" of the social sectors within the state, he defined as the singleness of purpose directed at achieving the objectives of the war within the people, the military, and the government.³⁶ "Friction" threatened this alliance by attacking what Clausewitz called the state's "moral forces."³⁷ For example, public opinion could become an element of "friction" as the effects of hardship and deprivation on the state due to war would accumulate over time and convert public opinion from an element underpinning the policy of war to an obstacle opposing the war.

Moral Forces of the State

He described the "moral forces" as a unity of stamina and will proceeding from each social sector and directed at achieving the purpose of the war.³⁸ "Equilibrium" was the continued flow of these moral forces in unity and harmony directed at the common objective laid down by policy. Loss of "equilibrium," Clausewitz said, was the loss of unity and harmony toward reaching the objectives of policy with a resulting dissipation of the will to continue the war.³⁹

Clausewitz said that "moral forces are amongst the most important subjects in War. They form the spirit which permeates the whole of War."⁴⁰ The physical properties of

war, such as tactics or weapons, "are almost no more than the wooden handle, whilst the moral are the noble metal, the real bright-polished weapon."⁴¹ A major factor within this "equilibrium" was public opinion.⁴²

"Moral Forces are Rooted in Emotions"

In analyzing the nature of these moral forces, Clausewitz emphasized that they derived their force from emotional not rational convictions. "Moral forces" took their strength from the human heart. He said, "...the human will does not derive its impulse from logical subtleties,"⁴³ and observed:

If War is an act of force, it belongs necessarily also to the feelings. If it does not originate in the feelings, it reacts, more or less, upon them, and the extent of this reaction depends not on the degree of civilization, but upon the importance and duration of the interests involved.⁴⁴

As a result, war policy had to be shaped with an understanding that, because the nature of the political instrument was violence, the state's commitment to achieving political objectives existed within an emotional medium and had to be directed toward achieving for the state a satisfactory emotional consummation.⁴⁵

Limiting the effects of "friction" on the "moral forces" of one's own state while shaping strategy toward

yielding an emotionally satisfactory outcome were two of the essential considerations of policy.

Clausewitz warned against wars of attrition that prolonged the exposure of the state and the army to the debilitating effects of "friction" which continued to accumulate as the war progressed. Wars of attrition had the effect of making the war needlessly costly while corrupting the army and the state, he said. "Our object in the above reasoning," Clausewitz wrote, "has been to show clearly that no conquest can be finished too soon, that spreading it over a greater space in time than is absolutely necessary for its completion, instead of facilitating it, makes it more difficult."⁴⁶

Owing to the nature of "moral forces," it was not necessary to annihilate the enemy on the battlefield to win a war, Clausewitz maintained. The effects of "friction" could decide the outcome by gradually incapacitating the state through erosion of the emotional commitment to the war. Clausewitz wrote:

In point of fact, the lost balance of moral power must not be treated lightly because it has no absolute value, and because it does not of necessity appear in all cases in the amount of the results at the final close; it may become of such excessive weight as to bring down everything with an irresistible force. On that account it may often become a great aim of the operation.⁴⁷

The "Algebra" of War

Attempting to prosecute a war with a policy that did not face the essential emotional nature of such "moral forces" unleashed in the people by a call to war "led to perversities which please man's weakness" and was a prescription for disaster.⁴⁸ Clausewitz warned policy makers against trying to make of war something it was not by disregarding the nature of the "moral forces" of war in an attempt to strip them of emotion and render them mere administrative tools of a cerebral activity between statesmen. Of this he said:

We may see from this what a fallacy it would be to refer the War of a civilized nation entirely to an intelligent act on the part of the Government, and to imagine it as continually freeing itself more and more from all feeling of passion in such a way that at last the physical masses of combatants would no longer be required; in reality, their mere relations would suffice -- a kind of algebraic action. ⁴⁹

The "Center of Gravity"

Concerning actual combat operations as a factor toward limiting "friction," Clausewitz said that the proper policy of war should be directed at "overthrowing the enemy, that is, disarming him, and on that alone."⁵⁰ Elaborating on this concept, Clausewitz asserted that within each side of a

conflict a certain "center of gravity" would form, a center of power upon which everything depended. This "center of gravity" was where the "equilibrium" of the state was primarily sustained. It was "against this center of gravity of the enemy, the concentrated blow of all the forces must be directed," he wrote.⁵¹ Strategy directed at attacking the "center of gravity" was proper policy since success would render the enemy incapable of continuing the war, while bringing the war to the quickest end with the least cost to either side. Discussing where to find the "center of gravity" in an enemy, he wrote:

...in States torn by internal dissensions, this centre generally lies in the capital; in small States dependent on greater ones, it lies generally in the Army of these Allies; in a confederacy, it lies in the unity of interests; in a national insurrection, in the person of the chief leader, and in public opinion; against these points the blow must be directed.⁵²

Proper Objects of a Policy of War

Thus, according to Clausewitz, policy should be directed at emotionally gratifying the "latent animosity" of public opinion, while limiting the effects of "friction" within one's own state and while attempting to upset the "equilibrium" of the opposing state by attacking the enemy's "center of gravity." This was the proper way to sustain the continuation of "moral forces" within the state at war.

And, more importantly, policy formulated with such considerations in mind was the more reliable path to achieving the political objectives of war. He observed:

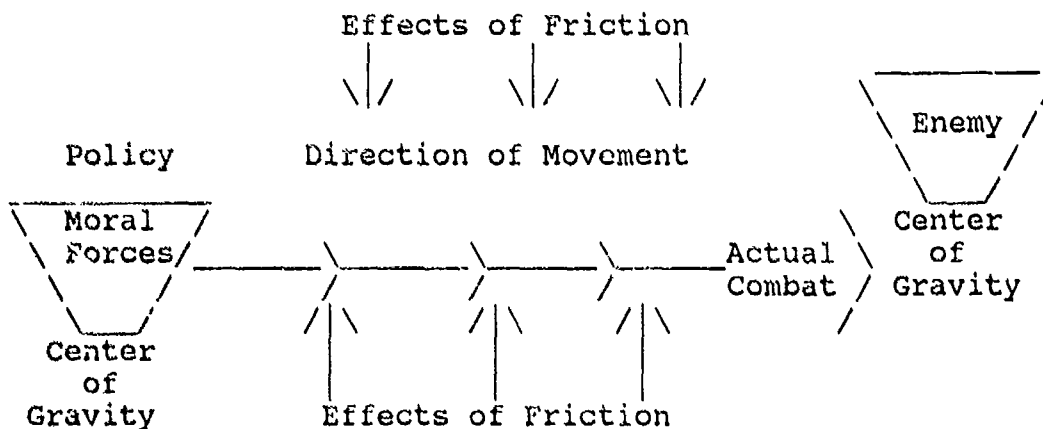
On the loss in moral forces there is no reliable measure, except in the trophies: therefore, in many cases, the giving up the contest is the only real evidence of victory.

It is this part alone which acts upon the public opinion outside the Army, upon the people and the Government in both belligerent States, and upon all others in any way concerned. ⁵³

Clausewitz' Model of Policy in War

The diagram at Table 2 illustrates the basic model that Clausewitz described concerning the proper path of policy and the effects of friction on a state at war. For simplicity, the diagram has not taken into account the policy or actions of the enemy.

Table 2 -- Clausewitz' Model of War



It is the purpose of this paper to evaluate news reports and editorials appearing in the Chicago Tribune pertaining to conduct of the Vietnam war using the model as described above, noting particularly the relationship between characteristics of policy Clausewitz described as "benevolence," "algebraic action," "friction," the "moral forces" and the "center of gravity." This is a test case to see if effects resulting from policy as reported in the Chicago Tribune would be anticipated in Clausewitz' model.

For example, would news reports give evidence of what Clausewitz termed "benevolence" or "algebraic action" in the formulation of the administration's war policy? Or, would reports have given the Tribune reader a clear view of what the administration regarded as the "center of gravity" in the Vietnam conflict? And, using Tribune reports, what impact were such considerations in making policy having on the rise of "friction" in the state and its effect on the state's "moral forces?"

Notes

1 See Anthony A. Adams, "Views of Veterans on T.V. Coverage of Vietnam War," Journalism Quarterly 54: 2 (1977) 253; Peter Arnett. "Reflections on Vietnam, The Press and America. Nieman Reports 26 (March 1972) 68; Edwin Emery, "The Press in the Vietnam Quagmire," Journalism Quarterly 48:4, (1971) 619-620; James Reston, "The End of the Tunnel," New York Times, 30 April 1975: 41; Kathleen J. Turner, Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press, Chicago: (University of Chicago Press, 1985) 4; "Ban on the Press in Grenada Linked to Vietnam Role," Los Angeles Times, 19 Nov. 1983: 19; Michael Mandelbaum, "Viet Nam: The Television War," Daedalus 111:4 (Fall, 1982) 157 - 169; William C. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, (New York: Doubleday, 1976) 174-175, 315.

2 Fred W. Friendly, "TV At the Turning Point," Columbia Journalism Review 9 (Winter 1970-71) 19.

3 Clarence W. Wyatt, "At the Cannon's Mouth: The American Press and the Vietnam War," Journalism History 13: 3-4 (Autumn-Winter) 104.

4 Wyatt 105.

5 See Emery, "Quagmire," 619-621; Daniel C. Hallin. The "Uncensored War". New York: Oxford University Press, 1986; See also, Daniel C. Hallin, "The Media, the War in Vietnam, and Political Support: A Critique of the Thesis of an Oppositional Media," Journal of Politics 46 (February, 1984): 2-24; Martin F. Herz. The Prestige Press and the Christmas Bombing, 1972. Washington, D.C.: 1980.

6 Peter Braestrup, Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1978) xviii - xxxiv.

7 Wyatt 105.

8 Braestrup xviii - xxxiv.

9 Westmoreland 410.

10 Drew Middleton, "Barring Reporters from the Battlefield," New York Times Magazine, 5 Feb. 1984, 69.

11 Wyatt 105.

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13 Kattenburg 262; See also Emery, "Quagmire," 619.

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Chapter 2 -- A Test Medium: The Chicago Tribune

Conservative Roots

The Tribune is one of the oldest continually published newspapers in the United States. According to a history published by the paper itself on Aug. 22, 1864, its founders were James Kelly, who later abandoned journalism to become a leather merchant; John E. Wheeler, who later took possession of another newspaper; and Joseph K.C. Forrest, Washington correspondent for the newspaper at the time the history was published. The first edition came off the press on June 10, 1847 with a run of 400 copies.¹ The Tribune became one of three daily newspaper serving a population of then about 16,000.²

As was the case of most newspapers of the time, the news of the Tribune was guided by the party affiliations of the editors and publishers, who obtained a readership by adhering to the terms of a "prospectus" that was circulated to announce the views the paper intended to support.³ "In politics," the newspaper history states, the new Tribune was "Independent, with strong Free Soil sympathies."⁴

The salutation from the editor in the Tribune's prospectus read: "Our views, in all probability, will

sometimes be coincident with the conservatives; sometimes we may be found in the ranks of the radicals; but shall at all times be faithful to humanity -- to the whole of humanity -- without regard to race, sectional divisions, party lines, or parallels of latitude or longitude."⁵

Despite such lofty ambitions, over the next several years, the new paper did not prosper and was in decline when Joseph Medill, who had successfully managed and edited the Cleveland Leader, was offered part ownership and the position of managing editor. Medill was a lawyer turned journalist who had been a supporter of the Whig party until its collapse.⁶

Under Medill's influence, the Tribune became staunchly conservative in orientation. And, for the next forty-four years (except for short periods of public service, including a stint as the mayor of Chicago, and briefly as Washington correspondent for the paper), Medill dedicated himself to making the Tribune one of the most powerful and wealthy newspapers in America.⁷

Medill became a national power broker of information dissemination and political influence. Politicians wooed him for his support and counselled with him for advice after they had been elected. He frequently took credit for having elected Abraham Lincoln to the presidency.⁸ He did not so readily lay claim to the credit many gave him for having started the Civil War.⁹

The tradition of conservative activism that began under Medill survived until well into the 20th century. During the first half of the century, the Tribune's managing editor, Col. Robert R. McCormick (a grandson of Joseph Medill), gained worldwide notoriety for using the newspaper to oppose and attack progressive legislation. According to one writer, from 1929 to 1941, "The Tribune under McCormick had the reputation of being the most pugnacious major newspaper in the United States."¹⁰

McCormick's strenuous opposition to both the New Deal and to President Franklin Roosevelt's policies leading to American involvement in the second World War earned for the newspaper a reputation for iconoclastic conservatism that lasted for decades.¹¹

In the eyes of many journalists and editors, the news values and reporting of the Tribune remained suspect down through the Vietnam era.¹² So, leading up to the war, the Tribune came from a conservative legacy.

Tribune in General, 1966-1969

On Jan. 2, 1966, (two years after large scale introduction of U.S. combat forces into Vietnam had begun), the Tribune used its editorial column to affirm its commitment to activism on behalf of causes it considered worthy under the headline "Ideals and Obligations." Above

the headline "The Tribune Credo" (a usual feature above the editorial column), was printed in extra large print reading:

The Newspaper is an institution developed by modern civilization to present the news of the day, to foster commerce and industry, to inform and lead public opinion, and to furnish that check upon government which no constitution has ever been able to provide.¹³

The credo was then followed by "The Tribune's platform for Chicago," a list of municipal improvements it intended to lobby for in the pages of the newspaper, and half of a page of collected aphorisms treating the subjects of truth and freedom of expression.¹⁴

The rough and tumble history between Chicago politics and the press seemingly had embedded in Tribune news values a sense of mission that saw little contradiction or conflict of interest in public lobbying for causes while at the same time reporting to the public what it discovered and considered to be the truth.

In addition, Tribune news coverage seemed to show that it shared with the rest of the nation's prestige media a jealous regard for protecting the prerogatives of journalists by becoming involved, both in its editorial page as well as in court, on behalf of causes it perceived as threatening freedom of the press.¹⁵

Truthfulness as a Tribune News Value

In spite of its announced intention to lead public opinion on issues of public concern, the Tribune nevertheless professed extreme concern with finding out and reporting to the public what it had discovered to be the truth during the process of news collection concerning any given issue. As a consequence, the Tribune railed against what it called "news management" by the government.¹⁶

Robert McNamara, Johnson's secretary of Defense, and the Department of Defense in general were the special targets of Tribune criticism. The Tribune warned the public of its concerns on grounds it described in an editorial on Sept. 2, 1966. It asserted that the Department of Defense had a cavalier disregard for the truthfulness of information it provided regarding the war in Vietnam. It also asserted that such information was being willfully distorted for propaganda purposes. Commenting on the history of Arthur Sylvester, assistant secretary of Defense for public affairs, the Tribune reported the following:

CBS Correspondent Morley Safer, in an article published in the Overseas Press Club magazine, recalled that Sylvester gave an audience to several correspondents in Saigon in the summer of 1965 and lectured them on their "patriotic duty to disseminate only information that made the United States look good."

When a news agency correspondent raised the question of the credibility of American officials, Mr. Sylvester replied: "Look, if

you think any American official is going to tell you the truth, then you're stupid. Did you hear that? -- stupid."¹⁷

Continuing, the editorial said that on another occasion Sylvester had stated that news, in his opinion, was part of "the arsenal of weaponry" available to the president. "Whether this means weaponry against the enemy or against the American people has not been explained," the Tribune noted sarcastically. The editorial concluded:

The success of our form of government depends on giving the people the facts. One of the reasons for the confusion and misunderstanding of the war in Vietnam is the effort by government officials to manage the news so they will look good.¹⁸

The Tribune found evidence for such attempted manipulation of public opinion in McNamara's preelection announcement in 1966 that there would be a reduction in the number of draftees for the war in Vietnam, followed by an announcement after the election that the buildup in forces would continue.¹⁹

Commenting on this apparent reversal, a Tribune editorial of Nov. 15, 1966 said the following,

From Lyndon's front porch McNamara had said that the 1967 manpower buildup in Viet Nam would be "nothing on the order" of 1966, when the forces grew by 200,000. A few weeks before, on returning from Viet Nam, he also had said he saw no reason for deployment of troops to Vietnam to "change significantly in the future."

Such a McNamara statement, said the Pentagon clarification, was aimed at denying reports that there would be an increase in the rate of sending troops to Viet Nam. Along with McNamara's Charlie McCarthy act on the President's front porch, this statement, too, served its preelection purpose of fostering the image of a slowdown in Viet Nam -- at least until the votes were in.

But once the votes were cast, the need to maintain the slowdown image lost its political validity and the Pentagon could return to its old stand of rearranging the truth.²⁰

The Tribune later used the occasion of Sylvester's resignation in January 1967 to again express its distress over the untruthfulness of the Pentagon's information policies. It noted that Sylvester, apart from the comments already noted above, had also maintained that government had an inherent right "to lie to save itself," and that the press should be "handmaidens of government." It continued:

If Mr. Sylvester's doctrines depart with him, it will be a net gain for the people and for truth in news. His successor, Phil G. Goulding, has been Sylvester's deputy for the last two years, and it is to be hoped that he has not been infected by his superior's outlook, which may, after all, have stemmed from Secretary of Defense McNamara, who likes to centralize all activities in his own person and to have the military speak in a unitary voice -- namely his own.²¹

Tribune hopes for greater candor from the Department of Defense under Goulding were short lived as a result of comments he made to the Senate Armed Services Committee in

confirmation hearings during which time he stated that he supported the policies of his former boss. Commenting on Goulding's testimony, the Tribune said:

If there is a right to lie in dealing with the public, it is a right monopolized by the government and allowed to no one else. Try lying on your income tax return and the government will send you to jail. Try evading the detailed census inquisition and you will get into a jam. The government is the servant of the people, and it has no ordained right to delude them.²²

If the Tribune was critical of government in regards to so-called "news management," it was equally critical of other members of the prestige media who, in its own opinion, were managing news with a "liberal" bias. In an editorial on Dec. 15, 1966, the Tribune extracted portions of an interview, previously published in U.S. News & World Report, which Arthur Krock, a retiring political columnist for The New York Times. According to Krock, The New York Times and The Washington Post had both fallen into the hands of an intellectual elite that wittingly or unwittingly slanted the news with a "liberal" bias.²³ The editorial quoted Krock as follows:

"What," he was asked, "do the so-called 'liberals' today want?" "I think they're 'statists'," he responded. "I think they believe in the state entirely--the regulation and rule of life by the state." Often, he added, this is indistinguishable from authoritarianism.

While Mr. Krock felt that the printed press made a fair attempt at objectivity, he said that it was frequently influenced by the fact that "the so-called 'liberal' political philosophy has become very general in the management of the press, in the editorial echelon of the press." This, he continued, "has had the natural effect of leaning communications too much to one side."

Mr. Krock added that when "you have the generality of news editors sympathetic with one, as opposed to another, political philosophy, then the choice of what subjects to explore--how to present them--is bound to be influenced by opinion."²⁴

Suspicion regarding the Pentagon as well as of the "liberal press" coalesced in its treatment of articles filed from Hanoi by Times reporter Harrison Salisbury following the strategic bombing in and around Hanoi near the end of 1966.

Salisbury's series of articles contradicted official Pentagon sources that previously had claimed no bombs had been targeted on Hanoi, the capital city of North Vietnam.²⁵ He gave an eyewitness account of extensive damage throughout the capital city and surrounding countryside, describing in detail the suffering and death of civilians attributed to American bombs.²⁶

Believing the Pentagon had once again purposely withheld the truth from the people, the Tribune was indignant in its editorial comment:

Reporting from communist North Viet Nam, Harrison Salisbury states in dispatches published by The Tribune that enemy charges are true that United States air raids have heavily damaged civilian centers. After

publication of his reports, the defense department reversed itself and conceded that civilian areas had been struck, but it contended that the damage was accidental....

But what leaves a bad taste is that, in this instance, the Communists have been more truthful than the Washington news managers, who resorted to a series of denials and evasions and confessed the facts only after they had been found out....There is no excuse for the government to withhold valid information from the people.²⁷

Later, as more light was shed upon the sources of Salisbury's information, suspicion arose that Salisbury himself had been used as an instrument of propaganda by North Vietnam, particularly in his assertions that no targets of military importance were located at Nam-Dinh city, where a number of civilians had allegedly been killed by allied bombing.²⁸ The Tribune reported that Air Force Magazine, a non-government publication, had obtained a copy of a document titled, "Report on U.S. War Crimes in Nam-Dinh City," which at that time was circulating as a propaganda sheet in Moscow. The Tribune also contended that the same document had been in the hands of the Pentagon for some time, but the government had neglected to make the report available to the public.²⁹

Air Force Magazine, said the Tribune, had subsequently pointed out the striking similarities between Salisbury's dispatches and the propaganda report. The Tribune concluded that Salisbury's reports were also suspect. But, the editorial noted that the Pentagon's closed-fisted information policies and history of distorting news had made

the war effort vulnerable to such propaganda efforts. The Tribune editorial concluded:

Had the same report been made available by the Pentagon in Washington as communist propaganda, it would have been on hand when Salisbury's stories began to arrive. Air Force Magazine said that, had this been done, at least one Salisbury dispatch would never have seen print. The communist propaganda sheet would have damned it in advance.

As it is, said Air Force, "The administration in Washington has succeeded in helping Ho Chi Minh's regime manage the news in a way that will be envied in many capitals."³⁰

The fact that the Tribune was sensitive to what it perceived as unjustified tampering with the truthfulness of news on the part of others did not make it immune to the same temptation.

By 1969, the Tribune had become concerned over the wave of demonstrations that were sweeping the country, many of which had become violent. The Tribune contended that the media were being held hostage to the opinions of a minority.

For the stated purpose of making its own protest against demonstrations and civil unrest, on Feb. 10, 1969, the Tribune ran a front page editorial under the subhead "We Protest" in which it stated that for one day it was not going to report any demonstration in the hope that demonstrators would abide by their own slogan, "Make peace, not war."³¹

Later that evening, Chet Huntley, co-anchor of NBC nightly news, commenting on the Tribune's so-called protest said,

The CHICAGO TRIBUNE, self styled as 'the world's greatest newspaper,' today put on a demonstration and roared a protest from its lofty tower above Michigan avenue. In a front-page editorial it scolded campus demonstrators and protesters.

It scouted *[sic] the proposition that they've had too much public attention and by way of penultimate punishment THE TRIBUNE, for one day, would carry not a word about college protesters or demonstrators.

So THE TRIBUNE really 'fixed their wagons' by declaring them nonpeople and their activities nonevents. You remember the king who, for a while, went around naked but had the people believe he was fully dressed because he said so.

Part of the gamesmanship of the college protesters is to cause old troglodytes and guardians of the establishment to lose their cool and look ridiculous. 'The world's greatest newspaper' continues to hold its singular attitude toward news. It screams about managed news, it declares certain developments to be non-news, and in 1948 it made its own news, when it elected Thomas E. Dewey President.³²

* The [sic] appeared in the original.

The clear implication was that the Tribune was betraying accepted news values by practicing a form of selective censorship.

The Tribune's reaction was pugnacious and outraged. According to reports carried over the next few days, the Tribune contacted the NBC offices in an effort to set the record straight by having a copy of its "We Protest" editorial read over the air "in the interest of truth and accuracy."³³ The original "We Protest" editorial had in fact carried the lines, "Tomorrow we shall go back to reporting this story. It is our responsibility to print the news whether we find it pleasing or repugnant."

But, the NBC reply was that the whole thing was really just a joke to see how the Tribune would react and that NBC did not consider it a serious enough matter to pursue any further.³⁴ The Tribune tried to pursue the matter. But Reuven Frank, president in charge of NBC news, maintained that the network had done the paper a favor by gaining for it publicity and refused the airing of a rebuttal, saying as far as he was concerned the matter was closed.³⁵

Finally, in an editorial on February 24, the Tribune dropped the matter itself while observing that NBC had not been fair or accurate in its commentary on the Tribune action.³⁶

Tribune Editorial Position on the Vietnam war

Prior to the introduction of troops, the Tribune had steadfastly opposed American involvement in Vietnam. It had opposed aid to the French in Indochina, who were fighting

"to suppress the people fighting for their freedom there."³⁷ And later, in 1964 it had expressed doubts concerning the truthfulness of the Johnson administration in regards to the situation in Vietnam. An editorial dated June 15, 1964, noted, "...the main concern of Lyndon Johnson in Southeast Asia from now until November is not to win a war, reverse the Communist tide, or save American lives. It is to save the political skin of Lyndon Johnson."³⁸

But with the introduction of American troops, the Tribune gave essentially unqualified support for the objectives, if not the methods, of the war in Southeast Asia from 1966 to 1969.³⁹

Tribune Support for the Vietnam War

Through 1969, the Tribune was unabashedly patriotic and, in fact, militaristic. Articles, letters-to-the-editor and guest editorials do appear that challenge the so-called objectives and moral justification of the war. But the editorial position is unflagging in its support of the war. And, in addition, the Tribune actively promoted initiatives to stir patriotic fervor and a martial feeling for the war effort.

The Tribune's general patriotic orientation is reflected, for example, in such recurring feature articles as "Flag of the Day" in which a picture of an American flag being flown over some local business establishment or

residence is featured. This picture was sometimes accompanied by a small article (one to two inches), but more often, just a cutline identifying the name and address of the location.⁴⁰

Another indication of the Tribune's patriotic militarism was its continued sponsorship of local ROTC competitions throughout the Chicago area. The Tribune regularly reported its own involvement in military reviews and competitions in which ROTC cadets were given awards in the name of the paper.⁴¹

Psychological support for the war even extended into the Tribune's treatment of the humor section. In 1966, the Tribune introduced into its comic strip section a serial called "Tales of the Green Beret."⁴² The content of this serial was reminiscent of propaganda of the World War II era. It continued to run until January 1968.

In addition, the Tribune went beyond merely providing information affirming support for the war effort in the pages of its newspapers. It actively organized and managed programs to benefit soldiers overseas (especially those in Vietnam), the families of servicemen living in the Chicago area and wounded veterans in local hospitals.

In 1966, the Tribune organized a program to pass short radio messages through volunteer Ham radio operators from local families to soldiers in Vietnam. The program was called "Voice to Viet Nam." A copy of the message form that a family needed to fill out was printed daily in the paper

and messages could be either delivered or mailed to the Tribune for delivery to the radio operators.⁴³

During subsequent years, the Tribune ran a similar program in which a family photo was taken free of charge by Tribune photographers and mailed directly to the serviceman.⁴⁴

For servicemen's families who were having a hard financial time, the Tribune sponsored a program called "Project Santa" to collect toys for the children of such families.⁴⁵

The Tribune also organized and managed a program called "Christmas Cash for Vets." The object of the program was to give to every wounded servicemen convalescing in hospitals in the Chicago area a Christmas card with a nominal amount of money included for personal use. The goal reported through all four years was to provide \$10 per serviceman.⁴⁶

For the president of the Tribune, the war went beyond whatever moral support the paper could give. On April 2, 1966, the Tribune reported that Lt. Robert Wood, son of Mr. Howard Wood, "president and publisher of The Chicago Tribune," had been awarded the Vietnamese medal of honor first class for distinguished service.⁴⁷

Tribune Treatment of the War

All reporting of actual combat in the Vietnam war for the entire period was built around an article which, for the

purposes of this paper, could be called the "regular report." It appeared almost every day in some variation for the four-year period.⁴⁸

The regular report served as a kind of fulcrum to the rest of the reports for that day. It followed a predictable pattern in that it was a roll-up of combat action reported area by area. The usual geographical points of reference the reports used in pinpointing where incidents of combat activity had taken place were commonly Saigon, Da Nang, "the provincial capital Hue," the Cambodian border in the Mekong Delta and the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone between North Vietnam and South Vietnam). This is significant because these locations are dispersed from one end of the country to the other and, over a four-year period, they all were regularly used as reference points.

Through 1967, the regular report had some sense of inertia and direction as it described units operating in areas for the first time with some specified goal as the objective. But after 1967, the regular report became a list describing events with little pattern except continuing violence in and around established points of reference.⁴⁹

A regular report that noted some especially noteworthy action was often followed by a special report providing more detail concerning the actual battle itself.⁵⁰

Combat heroics were featured especially if they involved servicemen from the local area.⁵¹ Reports were supplemented with occasional award ceremonies for winners of

decorations for valor,⁵² and in-depth reports attempting to explain the complexities of the situation in Vietnam.⁵³ And there were also the casualty reports.

Chicago Tribune as a Mirror of War Policy

The Chicago Tribune was selected for study because it had an editorial position strongly supportive of American involvement in Vietnam. If any prestige medium might have purposely tried to present the war in the best light possible, it would have been the Chicago Tribune.

An assumption of this study is that the risk of biased reporting that casts all aspects of national policy in a bad light due to editorial opposition to the war would be largely eliminated. Though the possibility of distortion due to bias in favor of the war is undeniably a problem, for the purpose of this study it was thought to be less of a threat based on the reasoned assumption that published news reports, at worst, would reflect the best possible face the war could have in terms of highlighting successes and downplaying the significance of setbacks; and, at best, assuming the restraining influence of news value standards shared by the journalism profession on Tribune reporting (as demonstrated by the Tribune's defensive reaction in the Huntley incident when publicly accused of selective censorship), reports would be a faithful reflection of war

policy as it was being disseminated through official sources to the media and the events that grew out of that policy.

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Chapter 3

1966 -- "Benevolence" and the "Algebra" of War

"Turning to the Vietnam war, the President said the United States is trying to tell the Communist regime of North Vietnam that their aggression cannot succeed, that if they stop the use of force, peace will follow. He said every American must know exactly what the United States is trying to accomplish in Vietnam. He said the greatest resource in pursuing the Vietnam conflict is the understanding of the American people and their willingness to carry, perhaps for a long time, the burden of a confusing and costly war."¹

-- Chicago Tribune
July, 13 1966.

As discussed in Chapter 1, there were two factors Clausewitz particularly warned against in formulating war policy: "benevolence," described as feelings for humanity that "blunted" the instrument of war²; and, a dispassionate attitude toward the formulation of a policy of war, which Clausewitz referred to when he spoke of the attempt by some statesmen to reduce war to a kind of "algebraic formula" gradually stripped of emotion.³

The influence of both these two factors seem to have played a major part in shaping administration war policy as described in reports appearing in the Tribune during 1966. And, the dominance of policy by these two

factors appears to have influenced policy of war such that it was not being shaped to meet the enemy, but the enemy was being reshaped to fit policy. Such, at least, seems a reasonable conclusion from the coverage of policy in the Tribune.

**"Benevolence" as an Element of Overall
National Policy as Reflected in the Tribune.**

President Johnson's state of the Union message on Jan. 12, 1966 called for numerous initiatives to establish and expand the dream of a "Great Society," not only in the United States, but throughout the world. To this end, he called for a foreign policy "to help build those associations of nations which reflect the opportunities and necessities of the modern world."⁴ Among other proposals, he asked Congress to support him in working to strengthen "economic cooperation -- to reduce barriers to trade -- and to improve international finance."⁵ He also asked for support to "help improve the life of man" by sponsoring programs to do the following:

Conduct a world-wide attack on the problems of hunger, disease, and ignorance. Place the maximum skill and resources of America in farming and in fertilizers at the service of those countries committed to developing a modern agriculture. Aid those who educate the young in other lands, and give children in other continents the

same head start we are trying to give our own....

To strike at disease by a new effort to bring modern skills and knowledge to the uncared-for suffering of the world and by wiping out smallpox, malaria, and controlling yellow fever over most of the world in this decade.⁶

It appears to be a speech laden with sincere "benevolence" as Clausewitz would put it -- and the scope of the proposals were widened "to make it possible to expand trade between the United States and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union."⁷

In addition to the other lofty policy objectives, President Johnson added:

The fifth, and most important principle of our foreign policy is support of national independence -- the right of each people to govern themselves -- and shape their own institutions. For a peaceful world order will be possible only when each country walks the way it has chosen for itself.⁸

Developing this policy statement, he wove into his general theme of "benevolence" on a worldwide scale justification for continuing the war in Vietnam. President Johnson asserted that formerly there had been "some in South Vietnam who wished to force communist rule on their own people." But, he said, their progress had been slight and prospects dimming. "Then," he

continued, "six years ago, North Vietnam decided on conquest."

Continuing, he said the United States had become involved in South Vietnam to help a beleaguered friend struggling for self-determination. But, he said, the United States was interested in obtaining nothing from its efforts except the satisfaction of defending freedom against the domination of communism.⁹ He added:

We seek neither territory nor bases, economic domination nor military alliances in Vietnam. We fight for the principle of self-determination that the people of South Vietnam should be able to choose their own course, in free elections, without violence, terror and fear.¹⁰

And, he added, "we will stay until aggression has stopped." Continuing, he said:

We will stay (in Vietnam) because, in Asia and around the world, are countries whose course of independence rests, in large measure, on confidence in American protection. To yield to force in Vietnam would weaken that confidence, undermine the independence of many lands, and whet the appetite of the aggressor. We would have to fight in one land, and then another, or abandon much of Asia to the domination of Communists.¹¹

The basic policy of America, he said, was to help countries shape their own destiny "from the genius of each people" without outside interference. He added, "That is

why it has been necessary for us to defend this basic principle of our policy -- in Berlin, in Korea, in Cuba -- and now in Vietnam."¹²

Thus, Johnson appeared to be saying that the war in Vietnam was a continuation of an essentially "benevolent" policy: continuation of "benevolent" political objectives with other means mixed in. And, as such, was an extension of the war against communism that had been fought in other quarters of the world and which at that moment had its aggressive "center of gravity" -- as Clausewitz would have called it -- in North Vietnam. Such would be one view reflected in the Tribune.

Over the course of 1966, critics constantly pointed out the apparent contradiction between waging war against a country supposedly representing the latest manifestation of world-wide communist "aggression" on the one hand, while seeking to increase trade with communist countries who continued to supply the communist side of the war effort on the other.¹² Could one be selectively "benevolent"?

The administration maintained there was no contradiction because increasing trade with the communist bloc showed sincere good will and was part of of the worldwide strategy of "building bridges" between East and West to lessen tensions.¹³

In the administration's world-view, reflected in the Tribune, such "benevolence" on the part of the

United States toward the countries of the Eastern Bloc was calculated to make the world's nations economically interdependent, which would lead to a reduction in communist "aggression" worldwide. Such a relaxation of tensions would eventually extend to the conflict in Vietnam.¹⁴

The North Vietnamese view was reportedly more straightforward. Communist ideology aside, official pronouncements from North Vietnam spoke of the conflict as a civil war for national unification that was only incidentally connected to a fraternity of socialist nations that gave the north their sympathetic support.¹⁵

"Benevolence" in Shaping War Policy

The essential "benevolence" of Johnson's overall policy, as reflected in news reports in the Tribune, seems to have colored his policy in regards to the use of force.

The officially stated reason for having to use force in Vietnam was explained as a means to convince the communists and the world that "aggression" was an obsolete instrument of policy for use between nations.¹⁶ "Old answers did not apply in this situation," McNamara reportedly told Congress "angrily" under questioning about the seeming ineffectiveness of administration policy in Vietnam.¹⁷

Administration reluctance to strike decisive military blows against North Vietnam also appears to have stemmed from a real concern that the violence in South Vietnam was leading to a confrontation with The People's Republic of China and the onset of a Third World War.¹⁸

The policy of limited force dictated by combination of "benevolence" and extreme caution in the use of force, as reported in the Tribune, appears to explain the limited purpose of policy explained as halting "aggression," not conquering North Vietnam. On one occasion, Arthur J. Goldberg, then U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, reflected the parameters defining administration policy when he said, "This is not a holy war against communism as an ideology. It does not seek unconditional surrender from North Vietnam or anyone else. It does not seek to deny any segment of South Vietnam opinion its part in peacefully establishing a stable regime."¹⁹

Such "benevolence" and extreme caution were also evident in remarks made by Goldberg as reported by the Tribune on June 6, 1966:

A great and respected soldier once said, "in war, there is no substitute for victory." Whatever relevancy that statement may have had in a nonnuclear age...[sic]* We must live by a new saying: There is no substitute for peace.²⁰

* [sic] is in original.

Statements of war policy attributed to other administration officials, as reported in the Tribune, also seem to reflect this underlying assumption of "benevolence" as a guiding principle. Harold Brown, then secretary of the Air Force, on explaining why severe constraints had been placed on air strikes that had been employed against targets in North Vietnam, said that there was "no doubt our air power could destroy North Vietnam if it were in our interests," but he added, "Our government does not believe it would be, and neither do the great majority of Americans."²¹

Brown said the existence of American air power potential "sets a limit on how high a rational enemy may be willing to escalate a limited war, when he knows that at some point further escalation would lead to his utter defeat."

Brown said the main objective of the bombing now is to limit and make more costly infiltration of men and supplies into South Vietnam.²²

"Algebra" as an Element of War Policy

In addition to "benevolence," Brown's comments appear to highlight another underlying principal guiding administration policy: that the military strategy of violence was directed at influencing an enemy presumed to be "rational," that is, an enemy who would respond in some logical way to a balance sheet of

costs in regard to attaining some specific political objective. This assumption could account for the use of two other revealing words in Brown's comment, words that were constantly on the lips of other administration officials called upon to explain war policy: "limited" and "costly." Brown continued:

"There are other targets that could be attacked but for a number of reasons have not been," he added.

"All of these targets," he continued, "are hostages of United States air power which operates over Vietnam every day. It is a constant reminder to the leaders of North Vietnam of an air power potential that is being used responsibly and with restraint."

"That power can be increased to a much higher level if it is concluded, on balance, that this will contribute to the attainment of our objective."

"It is also a constant and visible reminder to the people of North Vietnam that their leaders cannot avoid the cost of aggression."²³

These comments seemingly demonstrate that Brown shared the view that the struggle for South Vietnam was a "limited war" in the context of a worldwide confrontation between the "Communism" and "Western Democracy." And, being "limited," therefore could be managed as a limited enterprise using violence "responsibly" and with "restraint" to achieve a calculated end against an enemy similarly motivated.

In other words, the war was a "management" problem. According to this reasoning, the people of North Vietnam were susceptible to being dissuaded from pursuing their "aggression" as they responded rationally to harassment and intimidation by American "air power" not actually directed at destroying them. Such would be a logical response to good management.

A major underlying assumption of this rationale, reflected in the kind of language used in Tribune reports is that the leadership and people in North Vietnam shared with administration officials the world view that their struggle was indeed just a "limited war" on the larger stage of world conflict between communism and democracy.

Assumptions Underlying "Algebraic" Policy

There is little in Brown's assessment, as reported in the Tribune, that contemplates the possibility of an irrational enemy that would respond in a way not anticipated by the administration's "algebraic" approach to the use of force. Seemingly factored out of the equation were emotional commitments beyond the rational that might put the limits of cost much higher than was contemplated in calculations pertaining to this supposed "limited war."

U-Thant, then general secretary of the United Nations, seems to have contemplated an emotional commitment on the part of the North Vietnamese that transcended the administration's balance sheet of assumptions pertaining to "limited war" when the Tribune reported him saying:

I remain convinced that the basic problem in Vietnam is not one of ideology but one of national identity and survival.²⁴

Tribune reports coming out of North Vietnam seem to support U-Thant's opinion and suggest something other than a "rational enemy" engaged in a mere case of "aggression" against a neighbor.

In addition, public statements coming out of Vietnam reported in the Tribune indicate that the North Vietnamese policy-makers thought of the conflict as nothing less than a "total war."²⁵ Prior to the American elections in 1966, the communist Voice of Vietnam was reported to have broadcast the following:

"But they (the Vietnamese people) have always held that the decisive factor for victory lies in their own strength," it said.

"They are resolved to defeat, and, in fact, are defeating the American aggressor troops on the battlefield."

"This is the decisive factor which will lead to the conclusion of the United States war of aggression in Vietnam."²⁶

In spite of such announced resolve -- backed up by tens of thousands of casualties the communist forces were reported to be suffering by allied military action -- administration officials still tended not to take spokesmen for Hanoi at their word.²⁷

For example, on one occasion, Secretary of State Dean Rusk responded to dismissal of an American peace proposal by saying, "We do not regard as final public and negative reactions from the other side to our latest proposals."²⁸ On another occasion, "official sources," speaking about a so-called "peace offensive" the administration was undertaking in 1966, said:

The administration has not been taking seriously the series of hostile comments that have been issued from Hanoi, Peking Moscow about the United States peace offensive.²⁹

Despite assertive language and actions that indicated the North Vietnamese did not look upon the war in any sense as "limited," the language used by U.S. administration officials constantly spoke of war policy in terms of "imposing costs" on the enemy for the purpose of gradually making the war too expensive for the enemy to continue.³⁰ This seems to indicate that these officials shared the point of view as expressed by Brown.

A good example of this language appears in a Tribune article published July 1, 1966, under the

headline "Johnson Seeks Victory, Peace," reporting comments President Johnson made to a Des Moines, Iowa, audience,

He (President Johnson) warned that the Communists cannot wear the United States down and "cannot escape paying a very high price for their aggression...."

He (President Johnson) spoke of continuing bombing to impose "a growing burden and a high price" on the communist enemy.³¹

Some other examples of this "algebraic" language -- inputs expected to show results in certain outputs -- by other administrative officials regarding the waging of the war, as reported in the Tribune, are noted as follows:

Quoting Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara:

"Every quantitative measurement we have shows that we are winning the war."³²

Quoting "reliable" sources:

"Perhaps the central point upon which the whole peace offensive has hung was whether North Vietnamese leaders could be convinced that the United States military power and political determination made a continuation of the war too dangerous and too costly to be worthwhile."³³

Quoting Gen. Maxwell Taylor, special advisor to the president:

He said United States forces are gaining the greatest military advantage there. In the first three months of this year, 15,000 communists have been

killed, at least 60,000 have been wounded, and 2,300 Viet Cong have defected.

"With these statistics," Taylor asked, "How long can the Viet Cong hold out?"³⁴

Quoting Secretary of Defense McNamara

Reference renewed bombing of the North in the middle part of 1966: "...the program was designed to reduce the level of infiltration or substantially increase the cost of infiltration of men and equipment from the north to the south. There is no question but that we have substantially increased the cost."³⁵

Quote from Vice President Hubert Humphrey:

"It is a sign of strength, not of weakness, to be able to keep a war limited."³⁶

The policy mixture of "benevolence" -- feelings of humanity towards the supposed enemy -- and "algebra" -- policy dictated by a form of "management-by-cost-analysis" - - seems particularly evident in the following report relating the comments of Hubert Humphrey while he was in Asia representing the president on a peace mission:

In Vietnam, he said, the United States hopes to prove to the Communists that the cost of aggression is too high and that the only choice is to "come to an agreement as to the kind of a world in which we are going to live, at least in that area--southeast Asia."

"When this war is all over, we'll have to help economically for years to come," he added.

"This nation will be pouring out its treasury to help many countries that even abuse us in their words and in their deeds."³⁷

"Benevolence" in Defining the "Center of Gravity"

As discussed in Chapter 1, the "center of gravity" was that center point of power and will in the make-up of a state which sustained the overall will of the whole for continuing the war. In Tribune reports, the seemingly "benevolent" intentions of the Johnson administration in its worldview, which was part of the justification for being in Vietnam, and the "algebraic" managerial assumptions underlying the conduct of "limited war" also seem to be major elements in the administration's perception of the enemy's "center of gravity."

As was noted in reference to Johnson's state of the Union address on Jan. 12, 1966, the president had initially asserted that the enemy, in general, was the communist movement that threatened to dominate free people in many parts of the world; and the principal cause of the problems of South Vietnam resulted from an invasion from communist North Vietnam -- a tacit recognition that the "center of gravity" was North Vietnam. Over the course of the period, Tribune reports show that other administration officials shared this perception of the problem.³⁸ But, "benevolence" mixed with "algebra" produced a policy that excluded from

serious consideration attacking the "center of gravity" -- North Vietnam -- with the full weight of military power as an acceptable measure to end the war.

Policy thus formulated excluded conquest of North Vietnam as a legitimate political objective. As a result, because policy was constrained from attacking North Vietnam, the enemy "center of gravity" was redefined to mean not North Vietnam itself but North Vietnamese "aggression," and aggression by communist sympathizers in the south³⁹ -- certainly a less clear "target." As a result, policy was directed at attacking "aggression" while calculating an economy of violence against the North to limit its support for this "aggression." Explaining war policy, President Johnson was quoted by the Tribune as follows:

He said that American objectives in Vietnam remain what they have been in the past, that is, "to guarantee that infiltration, subversion, and terror mounted and infiltrated from North Vietnam cannot swallow up and conquer South Vietnam.

"We must continue to raise the cost of aggression at its source, and that is the sole purpose of our use of air strength against selected military targets," he said.⁴⁰

Clausewitz had asserted that successfully reaching political objectives through the policy instrument of war lay in correctly determining -- and then attacking with full force -- the enemy's "center of gravity." Tribune readers,

like the administration, would have had trouble determining what the "center of gravity" was. Apparently, so did President Johnson. As a result, so did the allied Armed Forces.

Evolution of the Enemy

Following the Christmas truce period of 1965, the Tribune reported that President Johnson extended the bombing halt of North Vietnam for 37 days in an effort to entice the North Vietnamese to the negotiating table. It was part of the "algebra."⁴¹

The Tribune reported that the North Vietnamese used the time to rebuild roads and move troops and supplies south, while President Johnson used the time to wage what he called a "peace offensive" in an attempt to build up worldwide diplomatic pressure on North Vietnam to negotiate with the United States and South Vietnam for an "honorable peace."⁴²

The Tribune reported that the peace offensive proposal was based on seven points:

1. The United States is prepared for discussions "without any prior conditions whatsoever" on the basis of the Geneva accords of 1954 and 1962.
2. A reciprocal reduction of hostilities.
3. A cease-fire could be "the first order of business" in any negotiations.
4. The United States remains prepared to withdraw its forces from South Vietnam

as soon as the country is in a position to determine its future without outside interference.

5. The United States desires no continuing military presence or bases in Vietnam.

6. The future political structure in South Vietnam should be determined by the people thru* democratic processes.

7. The question of reunification of the Vietnams should be decided by free decision of their two peoples.⁴³

(* Tribune style use.)

Close examination of these seven points appears to show that they are again based on the administration assertion that the root cause of the conflict in Vietnam was "aggression" by one national entity against another. Therefore, the "peace" sought was based on the assumption that it would come by a cessation of "aggression."⁴⁴ This prescription for peace compares favorably to a formula for "surrender" since it was based on the North Vietnamese giving up the field as a precondition for "peace."

It was also reported that Johnson was relying heavily on the Soviet Union to help settle the issue through British diplomatic channels.⁴⁵

The "peace offensive" ground down as North Vietnam ridiculed the "peace" that the United States proposed as an empty gesture that would win for it a diplomatic victory it had been unable to win on the battlefield.⁴⁶

The Soviets also responded with unbridled public criticism and sent Alexander Shelepin, an official reportedly connected to the KGB, to Hanoi to negotiate the terms of more Soviet aid to support the "righteous cause" of their opposing imperialism.⁴⁷

As events continued to unfold in the war through January, as reported in the Tribune, it was ~~evident~~ that little progress was being made toward either stopping North Vietnamese infiltration into the south or decreasing communist influence within the countryside by ground combat. As a consequence, according to the Tribune, air raids against the north were resumed on Feb. 1, 1966.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, criticism in Congress and throughout the country was building.⁴⁹

As a consequence, Johnson called a meeting of all major officials dealing with the war, including the leadership of South Vietnam. The conference was held in Honolulu, Hawaii, on February 7, 1966. The Tribune reported that the president announced that the purpose of the meeting was to formulate a "total strategy" for ending the war.⁵⁰ Johnson again lumped North Vietnam into the group of communist "aggressor" nations, saying:

If we allow the communists to win in Vietnam, it will become easier and more appetizing for them to take over other countries in other parts of the world. We will have to fight again someplace else. That is why it is vitally important to every American family that we stop the communists in South Vietnam.⁵¹

However, up until the Honolulu conference, no serious consideration seems to have been expressed in public by the administration for permitting the South Vietnamese communist insurgents to participate in peace talks aimed at ending the war. During this conference the first inkling that the U.S. was reviewing this concession began to appear, much to the dismay of the South Vietnamese leadership.⁵² After the conference, the Tribune reported that Nguyen Cao Ky, premier of the Saigon military government, insisted that "the defeat of the communists on the battlefield will not be enough, that total victory will involve elimination of all Red influence and winning popular support for a democratic government."⁵³ On another occasion, Ky was quoted as saying that he would oppose any effort to allow communist participation in the government of South Vietnam or even to allow it to be neutralist.⁵⁴ However, following the same conference, the Tribune quoted President Johnson as saying:

Johnson expressed confidence that if North Vietnam ultimately agrees to negotiating a peaceful settlement of the war, the stated refusal of the South Vietnam government to recognize the communist Viet Cong would not be an obstacle to negotiations.⁵⁵

In addition, at the close of the conference, Johnson announced that in formulating a "total strategy" for the conflict the main enemy was no longer the North Vietnamese and the indigenous South Vietnamese communists, but the root causes of the internal insurgency: poverty, malnutrition and ignorance.⁵⁶ The "center of gravity" had partly shifted again -- now to economic conditions. It was now more than communist "aggression."

Johnson was quoted as saying that henceforth, "Building a better society in South Vietnam -- rather than winning a military victory against the Communists -- is the primary goal of the United States in the war torn land."⁵⁷ Another Tribune reporter quoted him as saying that military objectives would take a back seat to social objectives; that in order to win the war it was as necessary to "achieve victory over hunger, disease and despair" as it was to defeat the enemy on the battlefield.⁵⁸ The two main policy objectives announced were reported as follows,

1. Moving steadfastly ahead on the military front "to defeat the Communists and punish the aggressor."

2. Moving vigorously ahead on the social and political fronts so that the deepest aspirations of the people of Vietnam could be realized not when the war has ended, but while, in fact, the war is being waged.⁵⁹

During this period, numbered among the enemies to be attacked, were illiteracy,⁶⁰ poverty, disease,⁶¹ and

lack of fertilizer.⁶² Thus, two important changes to the concept of the "center of gravity," as reflected in the Tribune, took root in American war policy: first, that South Vietnamese communist insurgents would be recognized in negotiations to decide the fate of South Vietnam. This was a major shift in the nuance of original justification given for the United States being in Vietnam: that is, to defend it absolutely from communist influence. And second, that a good deal of the resources for the war effort would be devoted to solving problems unrelated to the actual conduct of combat.

Asserting the principles of this new strategy, Johnson's emissaries again combed the world trying to persuade heads of state to put pressure on Hanoi to negotiate, but this time spreading the word that the attack on poverty would be "benevolent" -- helping the impoverished in South Vietnam -- and expansive, including North Vietnam itself if it agreed to negotiate for an "honorable peace."⁶³ Johnson proposed to export the "Great Society."

In addition, the Tribune reported that Johnson had contacted the Soviet Union again to help settle the issue by using its influence to persuade Hanoi to negotiate.⁶⁴

But, Hanoi ridiculed the proposals and the Soviets responded by calling the new strategy a cover-up that

reflected the "nervousness and uncertainty plaguing the United States government."⁶⁵ They may have been right.

As events unfolded, without any visible improvement or sign of interest regarding negotiation by North Vietnam, Johnson relented to critics and advisors who were calling for a policy of bombing that would attack strategic targets in the north. Subsequently, strategic targets began to be bombed in June, 1966.⁶⁶ Within a few months there were signs that the bombing, though severely limited in scale, was having an effect on Hanoi's ability to support the war.⁶⁷ However, there was still little evidence that the continuing policy of military restraint against the north or promises of social and economic development were having any effect on the determination of the North Vietnamese to infiltrate troops into the south to support indigenous communist forces.⁶⁸

As peace overtures met with continued rebuff, and limited military action seemed to be having only moderate success, the frustration of administration officials seemed to show as Tribune reports relate their asking for any kind of a proposal from North Vietnam -- other than the unconditional withdrawal of U.S. forces -- that would be a basis for starting negotiations toward an "honorable peace."⁶⁹ As a result, the Tribune reported on Oct. 7, 1966, that Johnson was launching a third "peace offensive" by organizing a meeting of seven different heads of Asian

states, which was held in the Philippines on Oct. 25, 1966.⁷⁰ At the conclusion of that conference, a joint statement was released which covered four points: determination that all aggression must fail; commitment to rebuilding South Vietnam -- "in many respects a more difficult job than the ones facing the military forces because it is easier to destroy than to build"; a commitment to regional cooperation in Asian economic development -- a new greater strategy for solving the problem of communist aggression by extending the "Great Society" to all of Asia; and lastly, a "feeling of reconciliation," with the Manila conference providing "new fuel for the cause of peace" because of the unity of the participating nations.⁷¹

The president was quoted as saying that while the communists must be convinced that the allies were unified and unyielding in their commitment to the independence and right of self-determination of South Vietnam, "The hand reaching out from this room is the hand of reconciliation."⁷²

Thus, the "center of gravity" had shifted somewhat again, at least in concept, from Vietnam specifically to the economic and social well-being of the entire Asian region. It was a wider war, although now partly a regional war on poverty.

The Tribune also reported that Johnson had contacted the Soviet Union again for assistance in pressuring North Vietnam to settle at the bargaining table. Again the

Soviets rebuffed such overtures.⁷³ In rejecting the proposal, the Tribune reported:

Leonid I. Brezhnev, Soviet Government Communist party chief, said today President Johnson was laboring under a "strange and persistent" delusion if he thought relations with eastern Europe could improve despite the Vietnam war.⁷⁴

As these efforts were rejected, the seeming frustration of administration officials was reported as showing openly as they began to plead for any kind of a sign of good faith from the north in exchange for a cessation of the bombing. The "algebra" seemed to be failing.⁷⁵ That was also true of "benevolence." What was the "center of gravity?"

Notes

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16 "Lyndon Sees Better Times In New Year," Chicago Tribune 2 Jan. 1966, sec. 1: 3; "LBJ Tenders Peace," Chicago Tribune 13 Jul. 1966, sec. 1: 2; "We Will Stay In Vietnam, President Says," Chicago Tribune 13 Jan. 1966, sec. 1: 9; "Bundy Backs U.S Policy On Viet Bombing," Chicago Tribune 26 Dec. 1966, sec. 1: 4.

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18 William Anderson, "Tells Peking Threat To Thais," Chicago Tribune 31 Mar. 1966, sec. 1: 3; "Taylor Warns Of Red China's Threat In Viet," Chicago Tribune 28 Apr. 1966, sec. 1A: 1; Fred Farrar, "Tell Reason For Limiting Viet Bombing," Chicago Tribune 23 May 1966, sec. 1: 2; "Viet Buildup Will Go On-McNamara," 6 Sep. 1966, sec. 1: 3; "Red China Offers Troops For Vietnam," Chicago Tribune 19 Dec. 1966, sec. 1: 8.

19 Seymour Korman, "Cong O.K. If Elected: Goldberg," Chicago Tribune 26 Mar. 1966, sec. 1: 3.

20 "Profs Out Of Line Preaching Cong Victory: Nixon," Chicago Tribune 6 Jun. 1966, sec. 1: 13.

21 "U.S. Could North Viet, Air Secretary Says," Chicago Tribune 9 Dec. 1966, sec. 1: 10; See also, "Taylor Sells Theory Of Minimum Response," Chicago Tribune 13 Jun. 1966, sec. 1: 9.

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23 "Could Destroy" sec. 1: 10.

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Chapter 4

1966 -- "Algebra," Deception and the Rise of "Friction"

A Multitude of Objectives

Throughout the period, the original emphasis on preventing communism from taking firm root in South Vietnam as the policy justification for fighting the war gradually evolved as policy objectives were defined variously as preventing communism from "overthrowing" South Vietnam by force without recourse to the ballot box¹; as achieving an atmosphere of negotiation in which all parties could discuss peace²; as the right of democratic self-determination -- including participation by communists, if the people willed it³; as a commitment to uphold American "integrity and credibility"⁴; and, simply as achieving "peace."⁵ All these are reflected in the Tribune.

A Tribune editorial observed that the real administration objective appeared to be to "keep feeding our fighting men to the guns of the enemy until things just peter out."⁶

North Vietnam called every U.S. peace initiative a sham and repeated its long standing demand that U.S. forces leave South Vietnam and let the Vietnamese settle their own affairs among themselves.⁷

In the course of the year, the stated American objective had evolved from meaning unconditionally stopping communism from spreading into South Vietnam, to mean creating the conditions for negotiations and self-determination -- no matter who participated -- and economic development of Asia to stamp out the root causes of communist influence.

In the meantime, American forces and South Vietnamese forces were still fighting the indigenous National Liberation Front and regular soldiers from North Vietnam. In other words, regardless of policy determinations regarding the true "center of gravity," thousands were still dying. It had become the long war Clausewitz warned against.

"Benevolence" and "Algebra" on the Battlefield.

The benevolence and "algebra" that shaped the war policy in general also had a profound influence on the shape of measures employed on the battlefield, so much so that policy was reported to have gone beyond shaping strategy to actually dictating battlefield tactics in an effort to limit violence.

While Johnson was pursuing "benevolent" efforts to negotiate a solution to the Vietnamese problem without having to first withdraw American forces or elevate the level of conflict, Tribune reports reflect the members of Congress becoming more adamant calling for either an all-out war or complete withdrawal.⁸ A constant theme of those calling for more violent and direct military action to end the war was insistence on using the full force of American air power against major industrial and supply points within North Vietnam, such as was done in World War II. Up until that time, the Tribune reported that it had been policy to direct air strikes against only specific military targets.⁹

But, he Tribune reported that Johnson was so concerned that the conflict would elevate into a confrontation with either the Soviet Union or The People's Republic of China that he took it upon himself to personally approve all bombing targets as well as other major tactical decisions regarding the use of air power.¹⁰

Chesly Manly, a Chicago Tribune correspondent, described the effects of such a policy on the war and on the morale of the servicemen actually risking their lives in the fighting in a report from Vietnam:

The most frustrating and agonizing problem of this war to the Americans who are fighting it is the continued immunity of communist North Vietnam from normal military punishment while the

enemy sends troops and supplies into South Vietnam at a rate greater than his losses.¹¹

Manly added that the president was regarded as "solely responsible for this anomaly" because he "personally approves the master list of permissible targets for air attacks in North Vietnam."¹²

Though bombing of tactical objectives was resumed in February of 1966, Johnson later relented to Congressional critics and the advice of military advisors, and strategic targets -- such as oil refineries and major supply depots -- were reportedly bombed in North Vietnam for the first time starting in June 1966.¹³

However, even after this strategic bombing had begun, targets were reportedly restricted and "sanctuary areas" were established.¹⁴ Additionally, military action against approved targets was reportedly controlled to the point of initially excluding attacks on North Vietnamese strategic military defenses that were a direct threat to American planes operating over North Vietnam.¹⁵ One report quoted an American Air Force officer, saying:

"What I am concerned about are the MIGs based on fields in North Vietnam," the officer said.

He made it plain he favors striking at the North Vietnamese MIG bases in the Hanoi-Haiphong area, but that he has little hope that the civilian decision makers will give a go ahead.¹⁶

This policy of control seems to have extended to ground combat as well as is reflected in a Chicago Tribune report in 1968 that quoted one soldier as saying, "You don't read about it. But one of our big problems in combat in Vietnam is that we are under orders most of the time not to fire until we are fired on."¹⁷

"Benevolence," "Algebra" and Distortion

Administration policy, as reported by the Tribune, frequently shifted both objectives and the conception of the "enemy" policy opposed. Thus policy became in itself a distorted medium: because of "benevolence," there was a lot of pressure to report "good news"; because of "algebra," there was pressure to report that "good news" in terms of quantitative data "proving" achievement. In the combination of both, there was a seeming tendency to want to see "good news" where there might not be any, and to back up this desired perception with statistics. As a result, policy that was permeated with what Clausewitz would have called "benevolence" and the statistics of "algebra" appears to have been making distortion an accepted way of doing business, which reflected in everything from budget projections for financing the war, to accounting for casualties on the battlefield.

As a result, by 1966 President Johnson and officials in the Defense Department were already constant targets of Congressional criticism accusing them of withholding the truth about the Vietnam war, in all its particulars, from Congress and the American people.¹⁸ Journalists were among the accusers -- or at least the suspicious. For example, on one occasion the Tribune reported the "long and not very happy discourse" of CBS commentator, Eric Sevareid, during a televised interview following a news gathering trip Sevareid had made to Vietnam in June 1966. The Tribune said:

Our "grand strategy" in Vietnam is a mystery to Sevareid. He questioned the "moderate" label placed on our military losses, stating that casualties are high not low, in relation to the total number of soldiers in frequent combat.¹⁹

Robert McNamara, the secretary of Defense, in particular, was attacked from members of both parties. One Congressman described his management style as "knowing the cost of everything and the value of nothing."²⁰

The animosity against McNamara was reportedly generated because he had made a series of forecasts dating from the beginning of the war -- reported dutifully in the Tribune -- concerning its progress and expected end, that did not come to pass. McNamara also had made several damaging misstatements, which (according to one

Congressman), he would try to smother "with irrelevant statistics and cries of 'baloney.'"21

For example, during the course of 1966, the Tribune reported that McNamara at first denied, then amended, and then admitted to the truthfulness of reports in the press concerning serious deficiencies in military units he had previously reported to Congress as being in a full state of readiness.²² Also in 1966, he had at first denied reports that there were ammunition shortages in Vietnam, which a Senate subcommittee later concluded were true.²³

The Tribune reported McNamara's lack of credibility as only one part of an overall pattern of distortion and misinformation apparent within the administration. For example, on May 6, 1966, the Tribune reported that "the Defense department had 'surreptitiously' slashed the claimed number of Viet Cong wounded since 1961 from 365,000 to 182,000 and had slipped them into statistics presented at a secret briefing to the House armed services committee."²⁴ The Tribune named Rep. Otis Pike, a Democrat representing New York, as the source for the information. The Tribune also said:

He (Pike) suggested that the Pentagon felt it had to cut the wounded total because the figure was reaching the point where it was becoming unbelievable.²⁵

When the Department of Defense was asked by reporters where the enemy casualty figures had come

from, the Tribune reported, the "spokesman said, he knew of no official source for such an estimate."²⁶ An indication as to where Pentagon figures for enemy casualties may have been coming from appears in a Tribune article on Jan. 2, 1966, which said that, among battlefield observers, such casualty reports were known to be estimates. Continuing the article said, "A joke among American soldiers is to refer to such enemy casualty estimates as 'Wegs,' or wild-eyed guesses."²⁷

As a result, reports by the president and the Department of Defense reaching Congress were received with suspicion even by the beginning of 1966. When a request for funding was submitted in January asking for funding to fight the war, Sen. George D. Aiken, a Republican representing Vermont, reportedly responded, "Who does Secretary McNamara think he is kidding? President Johnson has asked for 13 billion dollars to increase the tempo of the war. This is only the first drop in the bucket. To wait until after election to announce all these things is just another attempt to lull the people."²⁸

Accumulating "Friction"

In spite of tension and setbacks, the "equilibrium of moral forces" between the people, the military and the government, taken as a whole, appears to be still intact through 1966. The Tribune reported on Feb. 9,

1966, that a Gallup poll showed that 59 percent of the people supported Johnson's handling of the war.²⁹ And, despite objections by some members of Congress, the Tribune reported on Mar. 2, 1966 that the Senate had voted 92-5 and the House 392-4 to continue funding of the war.³⁰ In addition, Tribune reporters and wire service reports tended to report that the morale was very high among the military forces with few reported instances of discipline problems, atrocities or corruption.³¹

But the effects of what Clausewitz called "friction" were increasingly evident. Civil Rights leaders were mixing the simmering frustration of minorities with opposition to the war on moral grounds. The Tribune reported on Apr. 14, 1966, that the Rev. Martin Luther King had come out against the war.³² On Dec. 6, 1966, the Tribune reported that Julian Bond, a Black state legislator from Georgia, who had been expelled from the Georgia state assembly for reading a statement opposing the war in Vietnam on the floor, was restored to his seat by the Supreme Court.³³ He reportedly told reporters that he opposed the war because "negroes were called up to preserve a democracy they do not find at home. The freedom we find so false in this country is not the kind of freedom we want to export."³⁴

In addition, anti-war demonstrations had become common place, particularly on the nation's campuses. Some demonstrations were reported to have had several thousand

people in attendance and were becoming increasingly better organized.³⁵ And, some of the demonstrations had become violent.³⁶

Many intellectuals and prominent public personalities also were publicly protesting the war.³⁷ And even traditionally nationalist organizations like the United Auto Workers were beginning to officially announce opposition to war policy.³⁸

Policy and the Press Paint Different Pictures

In 1966, policy that was shaped by "benevolence" and "algebra" was framed within the limits of assumptions that asserted the existence of a people in South Vietnam who thought of themselves as struggling against oppression while yearning for free institutions in the Western mold.³⁹ Gratitude for sacrifices by Americans to assist them in achieving their goals seem to be taken for granted as an underlying assumption of administration pronouncements reported in the Tribune.

But press reports coming from reporters tended to support a different picture of the war. For example, reports from Vietnam revealed wide spread corruption among officials of the government, many of whom were reportedly engaged in stealing war supplies and selling them to the highest bidder, in some cases to the communist insurgents.⁴⁰

Press reports also revealed the antipathy of many South Vietnamese peasants for Americans⁴¹ and reported civil unrest that often had anti-American overtones.⁴² These kinds of reports tended to contradict the official view that depicted South Vietnam as a country that was valiantly defending itself against "aggression" and was grateful for American support.

On Oct. 23, 1966, the Tribune ran an Associated Press analysis of the situation in South Vietnam as follows:

The single overwhelming emotion among South Vietnamese is one of weariness with fighting. Much of the population, possibly a majority, is indifferent to who holds Saigon if only the fighting, the bombing, the artillery would stop.

About 80 per cent of Vietnam's population are villagers. For two decades they have seen their sons and fathers lured or forced into uniform by one side or the other.

Both sides have lied to them, gone back on promises, and levied taxes. Neither appears willing to let them raise rice and rear babies undisturbed.

Elections, democracy, communism, and other such terms are practically indefinable to most South Vietnamese. They have no heritage in either of the two major conflicting ideologies vying in their country.⁴³

Policy Blames the Press

One of the consequences of these press reports was that the administration began to blame the press for distorting the news. Bill Moyers, then press secretary to the president, said on one occasion that the "press generally tends to write its opinion of a matter, and then seek out facts for it." He added that the press consistently demonstrated "poor judgment" and was in general "very poorly informed."⁴⁴

On another occasion, the Tribune reported that the Associated Press reacted to such accusations of distortion when made by President Johnson himself. The AP responded by telling the president that it would be happy to print whatever "good news" he thought appropriate. The Tribune reported the incident as follows:

The Associated Press said in a letter to Bill Moyers, Presidential press secretary: "The Associated Press is very much interested in knowing exactly what political-diplomatic developments in South Vietnam have not, in the President's opinion, been given adequate coverage. The AP would be happy to carry whatever good news he has in mind. We would appreciate an early reply."

In response to the letter, a White House official said that the President would have nothing further to say on the subject, but added: "What he referred to today was the day to day progress of the electoral committee."⁴⁵

Commenting on the administration's accusations against the press, a Tribune editorial made the following comments:

In Vietnam the truth is buried in a deeper well than ever. There are no tangible yardsticks to measure the extent of victories or defeats or to gauge public opinion. The truth seems to vary from day to night, and from place to place....

If there is to be criticism, it should be directed not against the press but against the government itself. Its own statements on Vietnam have been consistently fuzz and contradiction. Events have repeatedly caught it off guard....⁴⁶

War Policy and the Path of "Friction"

Policy throughout 1966, as reflected in Tribune reports, was shaped by "benevolence" and "algebra" in such a way as to be found incongruously diplomatic efforts at obtaining a forum for negotiation with North Vietnam while directing the weight of war making capability at a variety of objectives, only some of which were directly related to combat operations against North Vietnam.

In addition, "benevolence" and "algebra" shaped a policy of sending men to fight according to rigid tactical rules of combat that dispassionately

depreciated their lives according to calculations of administration "algebra" at the same time it "benevolently" elevated the value of the lives of the "enemy." This does not seem to have been the kind of policy that likely would have inspired trust and confidence among Allied soldiers actually having to do the fighting. Such is one conclusion from reading the Tribune.

But, as discussed in Chapter 1, Clausewitz asserted that war was an activity that generated within itself internal obstacles that threatened the internal harmony of the "moral forces" of the state by eroding the will of the various sectors of society. He called this by-product of war "friction." Moreover, he said this "friction" continued to accumulate as long as the war continued to be waged.

Thus, by the end of 1966, a policy of war that was uninspiring to the "moral forces," difficult to understand and often suspect in terms of both real success and truthfulness was leading the state down a path that was becoming increasingly less stable due to the effects of the "friction" of war. Declining public and press support was increasingly part of that "friction."

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Chapter 5

1967-1968 -- "Friction," the "Moral Forces" and the Tet Offensive: a Test Case.

"Why, then, this restlessness? Because when a great ship cuts thru the sea, the waters are always stirred and troubled. And our ship is moving -- moving thru new waters, toward new shores."¹

-- President Lyndon B. Johnson,
State of the Union Address,
1968.¹

The Friction of Civil Disturbance

During 1967 and 1968, the Tribune reported about great civil unrest in the United States. The year 1967 saw the first "long hot summer" of riots that swept the nation commencing in the Watts district of Los Angeles, California. The Tribune reported that there were 164 disorders, "including 33 serious."² Much of it was racially motivated growing out of poverty and simmering resentment over long standing policies against minorities. And much of it was reported to have been directly related to protest or organized opposition to the war policies.³

So frequent and numerous did disturbances against the war become that, by late 1967 the Tribune had begun

publishing, in conjunction with its regular report from Vietnam, a regular report covering disturbances related to the the Vietnam war. This report was a listing of short items treating various disturbances from across the country.⁴

Such was the state of affairs that administration officials seldom could make public appearances without being confronted by protesters who often reviled them.⁵

In addition to civil disturbances, numerous committees were organized, some of which included in their membership prominent public persons to protest the war.⁶

By late 1967, officials at local levels were preparing for another "long hot summer." On Nov. 23, 1967, the Tribune reported that 125 new National Guard units had been organized in anticipation of summer civil disturbances.⁷ The Tribune also reported on several different activist groups making plans to promote unrest particularly in relation to the upcoming Democratic convention.⁸

"Friction" in Government

In addition to the combat casualties suffered and the bitter divisions the war was engendering in the United States, the cost of the war was increasingly a factor in the inflation of the currency and the instability of the U.S.

economy.⁹ As a result of the stress the war was introducing into society, the war was reported to have been practically a daily topic of bitter debate between Congress and the administration.¹⁰

Not only were there signs of "friction" destabilizing the "equilibrium of moral forces" among the people and their representatives, but there were also signs of the disintegration of the "moral forces" within the military. Tribune reports note with increasing frequency desertions by soldiers and cases of defiance of military authority.¹¹ Just as importantly there were signs of frustration within the leadership of the military as the Tribune reported increasing resentment at having to fight in accordance with "benevolent" rules that seemed to favor the supposed "enemy."¹²

Moral Forces Before the Tet Offensive of 1968

In spite of the growing "friction" as expressed in reports of widespread dissatisfaction with the war, the Tribune also reported, perhaps surprisingly, events that seemed to indicate that a large part of society still supported the officially stated purposes of the war in Vietnam. When a measure calling for the withdrawal of U.S. forces had actually been placed on the ballot in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and in San Francisco, California, two hot-

beds of organized opposition to the war, each measure was defeated by majority votes.¹³

Also, the Tribune reported that, after a heated internal debate, the AFL-CIO went on record as supporting Johnson in the prosecution of the war.¹⁴ The Tribune also reported the results of a Harris public opinion survey that showed the popularity of the president beginning to rise as the war seemed to be having some results.¹⁵

Thus, at the conclusion of 1967, the "equilibrium of the moral forces" between the makers of policy and the people, though somewhat battered, appears to have been still largely in balance though visible signs of the destabilizing effects of "friction" were everywhere manifest in the increasing size and scale of public demonstrations, civil unrest, Congressional criticism and military restiveness.

The Principles of Policy Unchanged

Despite this "friction," Tribune reports appear to show that the administration continued to adhere to a policy of "benevolence" and "algebra" with no clearly definable end as an object of policy, asserting that in following such a policy, the war gradually was being won.¹⁶

And, in trying to convince the North Vietnamese of his benevolent intentions -- despite the war he was waging against them -- President Johnson's continued his ceaseless

efforts to bring Hanoi to the negotiating table, the Tribune reported.¹⁷ In one such report, on Feb. 3. 1967, the Tribune reported Johnson to have "pleaded" with Hanoi to take "just almost any step" in reciprocation to his peace efforts.¹⁸ Such pleas for negotiations were sometimes accompanied by bombing pauses and extensions to truce periods, all of which were reportedly opposed by American senior military leadership.¹⁹

But Hanoi continued to answer such pleas with public rebuffs and used whatever respite was given it during bombing pauses to increase the number of men and amount of supplies infiltrated south.²⁰ The administration publicly complained after each bombing pause that the North Vietnamese were not interested in "peace."²¹ And, the North Vietnamese publicly affirmed after each pause that they were interested in peace -- on their own terms, after they had liberated South Vietnam.²² This was a position the administration seemingly refused to accept as final within the preconceived framework of its policy for waging war as dictated by "algebra" and "benevolence."

As a result, the administration continued to show its "benevolence" in public statements expressing ambivalence for having to use force.²³ The Tribune reported one such public wringing of hands after bombing was resumed following rebuff of yet another peace overture in late 1967. Apologizing for the military action Hanoi was "forcing" the U.S. to undertake, Rusk said.

Those who deplore the violence, as I do, should know that all the violence could end within hours with minimum cooperation from authorities in Hanoi.²⁴

Tribune reports also continued to show that the administration was still relying on an "algebraic" approach to the waging of the war as officials continued to speak of progress in the war in terms of statistics.²⁵ For example, Humphrey reportedly told reporters in November 1967, "By all measures -- roads opened, villages cleared, enemy casualties, and desertions -- we're winning militarily."²⁶

And, because of the "benevolence" and "algebra" associated with policy, the Tribune continued to report that the military continued to operate under severe restrictions that limited the scope and effectiveness of its operations while generating as measures of its effectiveness statistical data allegedly proving that it was winning the war.²⁷ Reliance on "algebra" continued to create an environment conducive to ambiguity and deception, which regularly was contradicted by the press and which in turn regularly kindled the anger of administration officials against the press.²⁸

Thus information policy seems to have been creating an environment that was undermining public confidence and understanding of the war while at the same time policy for actually fighting the war was resulting in accumulating "friction." This combination of policy effects appears to

have left the administration particularly vulnerable when communist forces launched a major military offensive during the Lunar New Year, or Tet, holidays during late January and early February 1968.

Preparations for the Tet Offensive

By late 1967, there were many signs that American bombing was seriously weakening the north's ability to sustain the war effort.²⁹ In addition, offensive actions in the south by U.S. and South Vietnamese troops had caused very heavy casualties among communist forces.³⁰ As a result, senior American military officers in Vietnam seemed more and more confident in their public predictions of a successful outcome to the war.³¹ Gen. Westmoreland's comments appear representative of such confident pronouncements by some military leaders:

"We are winning the war of attrition," said Westmoreland, asserting that intelligence reports indicate the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese are having "very serious manpower problems," leaving their forces only 55 per cent combat effective.

"Despite the fact that (the North Vietnamese) have sent their best leadership into the south, they have yet to win a battle of any significance," he said.³²

Despite such pronouncements, the press had become suspicious of the official estimates coming from military sources together with forecasts concerning the war.³³ On one occasion, the Tribune ran an editorial questioning the discrepancies apparent between military and civilian estimates of the size of enemy forces still operating in South Vietnam.³⁴

Despite confident pronouncements by administration officials and military officers concerning progress in the war, the North Vietnamese continued to repeat their long held preconditions for talks: that bombing of the North stop; that U.S. forces leave South Vietnam; and that the Vietnamese be left to themselves to work out their own problems.³⁵

However, on the Nov. 18, 1967, the tone of the North Vietnamese suddenly changed as they offered to the allied forces in South Vietnam an extraordinarily long 13-day truce for the lunar new year holidays -- traditionally the major festive season of the Vietnamese year. The implication in the tone of the message suggesting the truce was that it represented a gesture of good will. The announcement made over North Vietnamese radio said that "South Vietnamese government troops would be allowed to enter Viet Cong-held areas during the truces to visit their families."³⁶

On the Dec. 21, 1967, Premier Nguyen Van Thieu, then the "elected" leader of the South Vietnamese government, warned that the communists often used the "olive branch" to

shield their true intentions.³⁷ But, American officials seemed anxious to see in the truce evidence that the North Vietnamese were finally moving to a position where negotiations would be possible, which would be the expected outcome of "algebra" -- perhaps, after all, it was "working."³⁸

This perception of the meaning of such an offer was reenforced by the surprise announcement, reported in the Tribune on Jan. 2, 1968, that the North Vietnamese might be willing to begin negotiations based on the cessation of bombing in the north "and all other acts of aggression."³⁹ In a series of articles over the course of the month, variations of this presumed "peace feeler" were reported in the Tribune.⁴⁰

At the same time, the Tribune reported that a large buildup of North Vietnamese forces was taking place just across the border that separated South Vietnam and North Vietnam near a U.S. military stronghold at a place called Khe Sanh.⁴¹

The Tribune also reported that a great deal of political activity was underway within Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, as members of the urban guerrilla wing of the National Liberation Front were discovered to be exhorting the people to be ready for a "general uprising" against the government.⁴²

All this was ignored by the administration, and against the advice of both senior American military leaders and

senior civilian South Vietnamese leaders, the administration "relaxed bombing in some areas" in an effort to bring about peace talks with Hanoi."⁴³

As a result, presumed preliminaries to negotiations were still going on between the U.S. and the North Vietnamese when the truce went into effect on Jan. 29, 1968 in an environment of heightened expectations for possible peace negotiations.⁴⁴ The truce did not last long.

On Jan. 30, 1968, with many South Vietnamese soldiers on leave, the Tribune reported that several divisions of North Vietnamese regular soldiers and tens of thousands guerrillas from the National Liberation Front had staged a massive coordinated attack against dozens of locations throughout South Vietnam.⁴⁵ Within a few days, they had seized a major city (Hue, the traditional capital of all Vietnam) and had inflicted thousands of civilian as well as military casualties. The offensive had also destroyed much of the "pacification program," Johnson's social development arm in the country side, as refugees fled settlement areas and trained cadres of government workers were executed.⁴⁶ The attack had humiliated both the South Vietnamese and American governments internationally.⁴⁷

Surprise was almost total. A few days later, Brig. Gen. John Chaisson, operations director of American troops in Vietnam, told a press conference, "I must confess the V.C. (Viet Cong, a nickname for the National Liberation Front) surprised us with their attacks." He went on to

say, "We gave him the capacity for some attacks around Tet [lunar new year], but I do not believe any panorama of attacks such as has happened this week was expected."⁴⁸

By Feb. 3, 1968, the magnitude of the communist offensive was fully recognized by the administration as hundreds of villages had been overrun and many heavily populated urban areas were under attack.⁴⁹

In reporting the state of the offensive to Congress, Johnson appeared to have been trying to be upbeat when he reportedly said, "The biggest fact is that the stated purposes of the general uprising have failed." He went on to say, "Communist leaders counted on popular support in the cities for their effort. They found none."⁵⁰

But strangely, as if the perfidy of an enemy that called a truce and then broke it on a massive scale with the obvious intent of inflicting a decisive military blow should be merely overlooked, Tribune reports reflect administration policy that appeared to treat the offensive almost as a mere aberration in a truce, extraordinary only because of its size. When asked by reporters what influence the actions of communist forces would have on future strategy, Johnson said, "I am sure we will make adjustments to what we are doing there, but there will be no change in basic military strategy."⁵¹

Congressional response to the offensive was reported by the Tribune to be almost uniformly angry and critical over developments associated with the communist attack.

Johnson was accused by members of both parties of having purposely misled the Congress on the true state of affairs in Vietnam. Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, a Democrat representing New York, was reported by the Tribune to have said, "The administration is concealing 'our true circumstances in Vietnam in a mask of official illusion.' 'In December, we were told, and told at the highest possible level, that we were winning "battle after battle" that the secure proportion of the population has grown from about 45 per cent to 65 per cent and in the contested areas the tide continues to run with us.' Those dreams are gone."⁵²

Sen. Thruston B. Morton, a Republican representing Kentucky, reportedly said that the administration "is now desperately attempting to hide the gravity of the situation in Vietnam by hoodwinking the American people. The events of the past week underscore far better than any government handout the depth of the problems in Vietnam and the unwillingness of the administration to level with the American people."⁵³

In addition, on Feb. 8, 1968, the Tribune reported a large North Vietnamese force had attacked the Marine outpost at Khe Sanh.⁵⁴

Yet, in spite of the pounding American and South Vietnamese forces were taking, the Tribune reported that "high administration officials (were) 'considering' lifting a 21-day bombing halt while reviewing the North Vietnamese

position on peace talks."⁵⁵

To a Tribune reader, would such a response have tended to support and give vent to what Clausewitz said was the essence of war, the "blind instinct" of outrage and animosity that would follow a surprise attack under a banner of truce in which hundreds of American soldiers and thousands of civilians were dying?

If the "algebra" that stripped consideration of emotion from the calculations of policy was evident in the military response, "benevolence" seemed apparent in the political response of President Johnson's appeal to the North Vietnamese reported in the Tribune on Feb. 13, 1968:

President Johnson said tonight that despite the communist offensive in Vietnam, the United States is willing to hold peace talks tomorrow and would even let North Vietnam 'write the agenda.' The president said that the United States would pull its forces out of South Vietnam in six months if that country were assured self-determination even if thru this self-determination the South Vietnamese people choose a communist form of government.⁵⁶

A Tribune reader may well have asked, "If communism was after all acceptable, what was the fighting really all about?"

On Feb. 15, 1968, the Tribune reported that Hanoi had shunned all U.S. peace proposals and had returned to the basic demands it had asserted prior to the presumed peace overtures just prior to the communist offensive.⁵⁷ The

reaction of policy shaped by "algebra" appears to be reflected in the diplomatic language of the American secretary of state concerning the latest rebuff from Hanoi:

Rusk said tonight that in assessing Hanoi's alleged interest in political talks and making peace, full account must be taken of the negative meaning of the recent escalation of military activity by the communists.⁵⁸

A Tribune reader may well have wondered how "negative meaning" could possibly have been ignored?

A few days later, following reports of renewed American bombing of the north, the Tribune reported the following:

Johnson said that after a thorough review of North Vietnam's responses to repeated peace overtures, he was convinced that at no time in the last three years was the Hanoi regime ready to end the war at the conference table.⁵⁹

Influence on the Moral Forces

Over the course of the next month and a half, many of the communist insurgents who had conducted the attacks were killed or driven back into hiding or across the border into privileged sanctuaries. By early April, the garrison at Khe Sanh had been relieved by American reinforcements and the North Vietnamese attacking force had crossed back over

into North Vietnam. To some observers, the communist offensive had been a military failure.⁶⁰ But, Tribune reports reflect that the psychological influence of the attack seemed to have struck a decisive blow to the "equilibrium of moral forces" within the American state.

The influence of what became known as the Tet Offensive was not immediately apparent in terms of civil unrest. The Tribune, in fact, observed that reports of atrocities when committed by U.S. forces, had always been followed by demonstrations. But, now that there had been reported thousands of atrocities committed by the communist side, the protesters were strangely silent.⁶¹

However, the Tet Offensive had an immediate effect on the representatives of the people, which one senator was reported to have asserted was a reflection of a deeper change in the attitude of the people as a whole toward the war:

Sen. Harry F. Byrd Jr. [D., Va.] expressed misgivings today about the conduct of the Viet Nam war. Until recently he was an all-out supporter of administration policies in Vietnam.

In a Senate speech, Byrd called for a reappraisal of American policies and objectives and "more importantly the methods and procedures for obtaining those objectives.

"The Virginia people are patriotic," Byrd said. "They support our government in time of crisis, but increasingly they question the wisdom and judgment of our leaders."

"If I sense accurately the mood of my fellow Virginians, the national leadership has lost to a considerable degree the confidence of the public in its handling of the Vietnam war."⁶²

Further evidence of this change is reflected in a Tribune report on Mar. 10, 1968, following Westmoreland's request for another 206,000 soldiers to "'regain the initiative' from the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese" that had been lost during the Tet Offensive.⁶³ The Tribune report said the administration was thinking over the proposed request, and noted that "for the time being, Johnson reportedly is holding to the current strategy and urging Westmoreland to wring the utmost combat capacity out of the 510,000 American troops already in Vietnam." Meanwhile, the report added, "Officials comment in private about widespread and deep changes in attitudes, a sense that a turning point has been reached."⁶⁴

On Mar. 19, 1968, the Tribune reported that 140 members of Congress had called for a review of war policy before consideration of any further troop increases. Rep. Paul Findley, a Republican representing Illinois, was reported to have said, "The strength of this challenge reflects the breadth and depth of concern on the part of the American people with present policies." He continued, saying, "This action says clearly that more of the same policies, backed by still more American troops will not

do."⁶⁵ To the press help such statements were news regardless of the "effects" they might have on the readers.

In the Aftermath of Tet

The most significant effect the Tet Offensive seems to have had was on the president himself. Following the offensive, President Johnson appears to have spent a great deal of time and effort trying to restore the "equilibrium of moral forces" between policy and the people. Tribune reports seem to show that he continued to rely on "benevolence" as a principal of war policy. On Mar. 1, 1968 Johnson asked the state governors to join with the federal government in a "Crusade for Civil Peace." The Tribune reported him to have told them, "No society can tolerate attacks upon itself." He went on to say, "A people blessed with affluence and opportunity, yet beset by crime and civil disorder, is a troubled people."⁶⁶

On Mar. 17, 1968, the Tribune reported that "President Johnson told the nation's business leaders today that the United States 'is going to win' in Vietnam -- 'hopefully at the negotiating table but on the battlefield if we must.' 'If there position changes -- as we fervently hope -- then we are prepared to meet anywhere, anytime, in the spirit of flexibility and generosity. But, make no mistake about it, we are going to win in Vietnam."⁶⁷

On Mar. 30, 1968, in addressing a meeting of the AFL-CIO, Johnson reportedly said, "We will not let violence and lawlessness take over this country. We will not let it block our efforts."⁶⁸

Meanwhile, Congress had called a hearing to review war policy in the aftermath of the Tet Offensive.⁶⁹ Responding to questioning by Sen. Karl Mundt, a Republican representing South Dakota, the secretary of State restated the basic "benevolence" underlying the policy objectives of the Vietnam war saying, "The question is whether force is going to be an instrument of policy or disputes are to be settled by peaceful means. The major crisis of our day is between those trying to organize a world community on the basis of the United Nations charter and those trying to organize it on the basis of world revolution."⁷⁰

Mundt's comments on Rusk's testimony were directed at the problem of restoring confidence in such administration policy in the aftermath of the Tet Offensive. The Tribune report noted, "Citing the dissent at home, reluctance of American allies to help, and the troubles in fighting in Vietnam, Mundt said the problem is, 'How do you put Humpty Dumpty back together again?'"⁷¹

The Final Act of "Benevolence"

On Mar. 31, 1968, President Johnson delivered a major speech by television regarding developments in the Vietnam

war. During the course of the speech, he reviewed past accomplishments, setbacks during the recent Tet Offensive, and policy initiatives intended to correct the damage and move toward the long-stated objectives following a continuation of largely the same war policies. But, he announced, starting immediately, bombing of the north would be severely restricted and there would be no further bombing in and around Hanoi or the port city of Haiphong. At the conclusion of his speech, he also said that the responsibilities of the president in a period of crisis like that which the nation faced in Vietnam did not permit him to engage in mere political haggling. He then made the following surprise announcement, "Accordingly, I shall not seek -- and will not accept -- the nomination of my party for another term as your president."⁷²

Responses to the president's surprise announcement were varied. Sen. Fulbright, a persistent critic of the president's Vietnam policy, said it was "an act of a very great patriot."⁷³ Sen. Frank Church, a Democratic senator from Idaho, said, "It was Lyndon Johnson's finest hour."⁷⁴ Sen. Jacob Javits, Republican senator from New York, said the nation should be grateful to Johnson "for this new opportunity to renew itself, to make peace and to assert its leadership in the world."⁷⁵ Sen. Thomas Kuchel, Republican representing California, said the presidency had been lifted to its proper place -- far above politics.⁷⁶

But if above politics, then where? Clausewitz had asserted that war was an extension of politics. Of what utility would a president be who was now above politics? Further, Clausewitz had maintained that the strength, direction and resilience of the "moral forces" within policy were often found concentrated in the will of the leader of the state who was shaping policy. The impact of the announcement that the leader had set for himself a timetable for ending his own participation in the conflict may be reflected in the reaction of some who were less sympathetic to Johnson's announcement.

A report treating the military implications of the bombing restrictions in the north said, "Johnson's order for this 'first step' of de-escalation ran counter to the positions that were held by almost all of his top military commanders in the war zone."⁷⁷ One "senior South Vietnamese diplomat" was quoted as saying, "It is a turning point that is to the benefit of North Vietnam, not to the South Vietnamese government."⁷⁸ Sen. Mark Hatfield, a Republican representing Oregon, who did not support the war, called Johnson a "political fatality of his own war policy." Hatfield added, "We as a people stand at the outpost of despair. Faith and confidence in our leadership must be restored to our nation."⁷⁹

In regards to the impact such an announcement would have on those actually having to do the fighting, Johnson reportedly said, "I think they will understand what I've

done. I hope they appreciate the value that flows from it."⁸⁰

Commenting on the possible effects of Johnson's announcement on the war effort in general and on the military specifically, a Tribune editorial noted, "Either the war in Vietnam is a valid cause prosecuted for a good and defensible reason, or it is not. How can its validity be proved if the man who has defended it and said he would see to it that aggression would not pay suddenly throws in his cards?"⁸¹

A Tribune dispatch reporting the reaction of three soldiers in the Mekong Delta of South Vietnam may reflect and typify the range of reactions within the military to the announcement of the bombing halt and to Johnson's statement he would not again run for president,

On hearing the president's proposal for a bombing pause, one GI in the delta turned from his transistor radio and said: "They'll bury all of us."

"This is handing the country to the communists on a platter," another soldier said.

"You guys are crazy," said a third man. "This means we'll go home sooner. That is what I want."⁸²

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Chapter 6

1969 -- Continuation of Policy; Conclusions

"The racial strife, the educational clashes, the generation gap, and even inflation are simply domestic flame-throwers, each getting fuel from the same tank in Vietnam which allows our generals to sear the flesh of people whom you and I have never seen."¹

-- Teddy O'Toole, 1968
National Chairman of
the Student Coalition
for Humphrey.

The State of Equilibrium

By 1969, a new president, Richard M. Nixon, was in office, but the Tribune reported little immediate effort on his part to fundamentally change the nature of the war either by resuming the strategic bombing of the north or by taking any action that would directly threaten North Vietnam's territorial integrity.² A primary administration goal remained resolving the conflict by negotiations.³

There were reportedly changes in restrictions on the military regarding attacking areas formerly regarded as sanctuaries within Cambodia and Laos.⁴ But, if anything, battlefield tactics appear to have become more cautious and less confrontational at Nixon's direction.⁵ And, there were

also indications that Nixon was pursuing the same deceptive information management policy of the former administration.⁶

Meanwhile, the Tribune reported that apologists for the war, some of them officials in the former administration, were publicly asserting that the United States had accomplished its objectives in the war and could justifiably leave without losing face.⁷ Thus, many who formerly tried to defend policy justification for the war became part of the "friction" against the war.

In addition, the Tribune reported that civil unrest and public demonstrations against the war had become massive.⁸ One demonstration against the war in Washington, D.C., that took place on Nov. 15, 1969, reportedly drew 250,000 people.⁹

Congressional opponents to the war had become more numerous and more strident in their demand for an immediate end to the war, by unilateral withdrawal if necessary.¹⁰

Also by 1969, the destabilizing effects of prolonged exposure to the "friction" of warfare seemed clearly apparent in the "equilibrium of moral forces" between the military and the people as there was a reported decline in the willingness among the people to serve in the military.¹¹

Reports in the Tribune also showed scandal becoming frequent within the military itself: The Sergeant Major of the Army, the senior enlisted man in the Army, was indicted for operating the military club system in Vietnam for personal profit¹²; a group of Special Forces soldiers were

accused of murdering a Vietnamese civilian suspected of being a communist agent¹³; a platoon leader of an infantry unit in the Army was court-martialed for the murders of a number of Vietnamese civilians suspected of providing support to local communist guerrillas at a place called My Lai.¹⁴

In addition, the internal equilibrium of the military was reported by the Tribune in terms that would make it appear progressively less stable. Reports of deserters became commonplace.¹⁵ There were also frequent reports of waning discipline and open defiance of military authority.¹⁶ And there were reports of increasing racial tension.¹⁷ The Army, in other words, was falling apart -- perhaps itself a victim of "friction."

The Continuing Moral Force of the People

In spite of the turmoil, dissension and scandal, there is nevertheless some evidence that what Clausewitz called the "latent animosity" in the people for the "enemy" still existed as late as 1969. The results of a series of Harris public opinion surveys were published in the Tribune during November and December 1969 that appear to reflect this latent animosity toward the "enemy" as well as frustration in directing this emotion in a meaningful way at the "enemy." In response to a question asking whether those surveyed considered committing troops to Vietnam a mistake,

59 percent said it had been, 25 percent said it had not been and 16 percent had no opinion. However, when asked whether they agreed with the statement, "We cannot sit by now and let the Communists take over other countries of Asia," 53 percent said they agreed with the statement, 32 percent said they disagreed and 15 percent said they were not sure.¹⁸ In a related survey, a majority also supported sending military advisors into Laos for the purpose of opposing communism.¹⁹ Interpreting these and other public opinion survey results, Harris wrote:

The emotional pull and the temptation as a super-power not to stand by if countries are overrun is a deep one. Our national instincts as a people are to rally to the support of our weaker allies and friends.²⁰

But, he continued:

Most Americans are still committed to the idea of resisting communist aggression in Asia. But they also feel they have learned -- the hard way -- that commitment of fighting troops to the mainland of Asia has been a "mistake."²¹

Against this backdrop of equilibrium out of balance, the Tribune reported that Nixon had adopted a strategy that by the end of 1969 appears to have been restoring some "equilibrium" to the "moral forces" of the state. He appears to have done this by adopting two additional objectives for the war in Vietnam: emphasizing the training of the South Vietnamese Army in anticipation of them

assuming the full burden of their own defense; and gradual withdrawal of U.S. forces.²²

In spite of continuing civil disturbances and dissension over the war that were reported in the Tribune, by the end of 1969, there is evidence that Nixon was having success in rallying the "blind instinct" of the people behind the war by emphasizing "progress" toward his "new" objectives. On Dec. 4, 1969, the Tribune reported that a CBS poll showed rising public support for Nixon's handling of the war. According to the poll, his approval rating was reflected in a rise in the percentage of people who did not support immediate withdrawal from Vietnam, up from 60 percent earlier in the year to 67 percent in late November.²³ Commenting on the significance of the poll, a CBS spokesman reportedly said:

The administration has apparently had some success in rallying public opinion to its policy of gradual withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam and Vietnamization of the war, CBS said.

The rising expectations of "latent animosity" seem apparent as the Tribune reported:

Asked by CBS if they would favor an all out attack on North Vietnam if they knew it would end the war, 7 out of 10 said they would advocate such an attack.

"Remarkably, among those who favor immediate withdrawal, six out of 10 said they would favor such an attack if they knew it would end the war immediately," CBS said.²⁴

Conclusions Using Clausewitz

The purpose of this paper has been to use a case study to suggest that the major factor leading to public disillusionment with the war was not media treatment of the war, but war policy itself. The researcher tried to give a fair and even-handed rendition of policy as it actually appeared to the reader of the Tribune from 1966 through 1969. And indeed, using Clausewitz as a model, despite the Tribune's generally unwaivering support for the war through the period, the image of policy from 1966-69 was described in terms that make policy appear to have had just those characteristics against which Clausewitz warned: a mixing of "benevolence" combined with a conscious effort by policy makers to reduce war to a kind of "algebra" -- defined by inputs, outputs and "body counts."

News accounts in the pages of the Tribune also seem to document the domestic effects of accumulating "friction" that Clausewitz's model predicts as the U.S. followed a changing war policy. "Friction" appeared to manifest itself at home in civil disobedience and violent demonstrations, and in a corrosive attitude of criticism and frustration within the government and the people. And, "friction" appeared to manifest itself abroad in corruption and decreasing discipline within the U.S. military as well as within the South Vietnamese government. All this was

reflected in the Tribune. One might speculate that the effects of these stories, editorials and columns accumulated and combined to erode public support and impede prosecution of the war. But, could the prestige press have avoided reporting such events despite of whatever editorial bias they might have had? Probably not, because these events were legitimate news.

Thus even the Chicago Tribune unwillingly may have played a part in spreading public discontent with the war as it gave accurate accounts of the uncertain results of policy. In addition, using Clausewitz' model, Tribune reports seemed to reflect an image of policy that purposely set itself at variance with what Clausewitz asserted would be required to sustain the moral forces of a state in its efforts to successfully achieve the objectives of war policy. He argued there should be a clear objective, a clearly defined "center of gravity."

Clausewitz warned that because war was waged at the cost of human life and suffering, it should be understood as nothing less than a "serious means for a serious object."²⁵ Avoid it if you can; win it -- rapidly -- if you must. In connection with that assertion, Clausewitz warned against efforts to make war "less serious" by trying to mix two essentially incompatible elements: the latent animosity of "hatred" for the enemy that resides within the people and which is released when policy makes war, and "benevolence" -- feelings of compassion which lead to viewing and making

policy decisions that treat the enemy as less than an "enemy." Clausewitz warned against efforts by statesmen, repelled by their personal repugnance to war, to try and domesticate war by disregarding its essential nature in an attempt to reduce the policy of coercion to a mere cerebral activity, sapped of emotion in an effort to rid it of its nature. "Let us not hear of Generals who conquer without bloodshed," Clausewitz wrote. "If a bloody slaughter is a horrible sight, then that is a ground for paying more respect to war, but not for making the sword we wear blunter and blunter by degrees from feelings of humanity."²⁶

The effect of such a diluted mixture of emotional motivations, Clausewitz asserted, would only serve to reduce war from its proper nature as a "tremendous battle-sword, which should be lifted with both hands and the whole power of the body to strike once for all, into a light handy weapon, which is even sometimes nothing more than a rapier to exchange thrusts and feints and parries"²⁷ though seeming to be the former. But what was clear to the theorist Clausewitz would not have been so clear to Tribune readers.

For example, administration officials appear to have had an especially difficult time bringing themselves to express genuine animosity for the so-called "enemy" they were sending soldiers off to fight against. They sometimes spoke of the "enemy" almost as a poverty-stricken friend who did lamentable things and who should be corrected by the stern but paternal friendship of the United States. Hence

there was continuing ambivalence built into policy, which was openly and frequently expressed by policy-makers themselves while they tried repeatedly through a form of "algebra" to calculate how much force and death could reasonably be inflicted on the wayward friend in order to force a mending of his ways. Thus, as one observer noted, policy produced "the frightening reality that the hunted in this search-and-destroy scenario was a foe whom no one really hated."²⁸

This policy of "benevolence" contrasted awkwardly with the "hatred" Clausewitz said was latent in the people who would be called upon to send their sons to fight and die against the so-called enemy. Thus the major sustaining moral force of "latent animosity" for the enemy drew little stimulation or encouragement from the partly "benevolent" administration policy. In such ambivalent circumstances, could a people be expected to send its sons off, perhaps to be killed, for a cause no more "serious" than correcting a wayward friend?

In actually fighting the war, policy reported in the Tribune described efforts to attack every point but the "center of gravity" -- North Vietnam -- in a decisive way. North Vietnam was never seriously threatened territorially, but instead was heavily bombed at its periphery in accordance with calculations of "algebra" and "benevolence" that prescribed a policy both malevolent yet somehow charitable. These are indications of the less than

"serious" policy of making war against which Clausewitz warned.

The overall effect of such policy toward the conflict, as reported in the Tribune, appeared to have been prolonging a war of attrition that, in the words of Clausewitz, dragged itself "feebly along like a body worn out with sickness."²⁹

No critic in the media needed to tell the public that the war policies were failing to achieve tangible objectives. What would appear to have been most likely to convince the Tribune reader of the futility of war policy was the futility -- at least unclarity -- of the reports on war policy. And when the "equilibrium of the moral forces" within the state was destabilized following the Tet Offensive, the environment that policy had created in terms of "on again, off again" expectations of ending the war in connection with a history of distortion, miscalculation and deception, created a situation in which the "equilibrium" once lost was not restored except to rally around the objective of leaving Vietnam.

Clausewitz might have concluded that by 1969, not only had the "equilibrium" of the state been dealt an irreversible blow following Tet, but that the chief factor among the various sources of accumulating "friction," as reported in the Tribune, was the "latent animosity" in the people which, having found no avenue to vent itself through the policy of war, had turned to vent itself against the policy of war.

By its end in 1975, some said the United States had "won" the war before its troops left in 1972. Others said the United States had lost. Yet surely many Tribune readers in 1966-1969 must have wondered: "Who was the enemy?"

Was it the North Vietnamese Regular Army? The South Vietnamese National Liberation Front? The Red Chinese? Or, the Russians? Was it worldwide communism? Or, was it simply poverty leading people to do bad things? Was it a lack of education? Corrupt South Vietnamese officials? Was the enemy an indecisive president or an unsupportive Congress? Was it demonstrators and protesters or internal dissent? Or, as some have asserted as noted in Chapter 1, was the press which reported policy concerning all these things the "enemy?"

Clausewitz, surely, would have been more clearheaded.

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